

DAILY NEWSP APER ANALYSIS

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U.S. 'allows' India to buy Russian oil for 30 days

Oil from Russia may no longer be available at a discount, with Beijing competing for supplies

India has 25 days of crude oil in reserve, and 25 days of petrol and diesel each, sources say

Global oil supplies are currently constrained due to Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz

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NEW DELHI

The U.S. Treasury Department on Friday issued an order that would "allow" India to import Russian oil for 30 days, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said while sharing the order on X.

Analysts say this will help mitigate the spike in the price of oil and delays in oil shipments to import-dependent India.

However, government sources confirmed that Russian oil may no longer come at a discount and that China was also competing for it. The government is currently studying the legal order, they added.

Mr. Bessent said the U.S. was granting India this reprieve to "alleviate pressure caused by Iran's attempt to take global energy hostage".

"This deliberately short-

term measure will not provide significant financial benefits to the Russian government as it only authorises transactions involving oil already stranded at sea," Mr. Bessent said.

The price of Brent crude has increased to nearly \$88 a barrel, a jump of about 20% in a week.

Global oil supplies are currently constrained due to Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and tankers avoiding the region due to the conflict.

This comes at a time when the Indian government has made assurances that the country has adequate amounts of crude oil, petrol and diesel in reserve. According to sources, India currently has 25 days of crude oil in reserve, and 25 days of petrol and diesel each.

Current status
A previous analysis by The Hindu of the latest preliminary data from the Ministry of Commerce and

Congress slams Centre over U.S. remarks

NEW DELHI
Criticising the Centre over U.S. remarks, the Congress on Friday said it is "deeply humiliating for India's sovereignty". Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, in a post on X, alleged that India's strategic autonomy and national sovereignty are under threat "because PM Narendra Modi is getting blackmailed on Eposh files and Adani case". **▶ PAGE 5**

Industry shows that India imported \$1.98 billion worth of crude oil from Russia in January 2026, the lowest since December 2022. In comparison, Russia's share was 22.9% two months earlier, and 33% in May 2025.

"Considering more than 55% of India's oil imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, elevated price and delays will stretch India's oil bill (\$11.5bn/month) unless India ramps



ports fell to 19.3% in January 2026, the lowest since December 2022. In comparison, Russia's share was 22.9% two months earlier, and 33% in May 2025.

"Considering more than 55% of India's oil imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, elevated price and delays will stretch India's oil bill (\$11.5bn/month) unless India ramps

up imports from Russia 09% currently versus 43% in July 2024," JM Financial Services said in a note.

It added that, in the "extreme" scenario of Brent crude prices breaching the \$90 per barrel mark, India's current account deficit (CAD) could stretch to 1.4% of GDP, and the rupee could depreciate to ₹95 per U.S. dollar.

Consumers told to use cooking fuel judiciously

CHENNAI
With restrictions placed on LPG supplies for both domestic and commercial consumers, the public has been advised to use the fuel judiciously. Single bottle domestic consumers will be allowed to make fresh bookings only after 21 days from the date of last booking. Commercial consumers using 19 kg cylinders were told they will not be given supplies, sources said. **▶ PAGE 11**

Moody's also pointed out that India stands out among the large Asian economies that rely on crude and LNG from West Asia East due to its high share of West Asian crude among total oil imports, and pressure from the U.S. to cut its energy imports from Russia.

"Costly energy imports would weaken the rupee,

raise inflation, worsen the current account balance and complicate monetary policy as well as fiscal management if they lead to expanded subsidies to help offset the economic shock," Moody's said.

The sources in the government, however, said that Indian refiners have sourced more crude stocks from other parts of the world than what is currently stuck in the Strait of Hormuz.

In his post, Mr. Bessent further said that "India is an essential partner of the United States", and that the U.S. anticipates that India will "ramp up" purchases of U.S. oil.

Data show that India has been increasing its imports from the U.S. over the past few months. That is, India imported \$11.6 billion worth of crude oil from the U.S. between April 2025 and January 2026, which is 32% higher than in the same period of the previous financial year.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- The U.S. Treasury Department granted a 30-day authorization allowing India to import Russian crude oil already stranded at sea.
- The decision comes amid disruptions in global oil supply due to tensions around the Strait of Hormuz, where tanker movement has been affected.
- Brent crude prices rose to around \$88 per barrel, reflecting supply constraints.
- India currently holds about 25 days of crude oil reserves and 25 days of petrol and diesel reserves.
- Russia's share in India's crude oil imports declined to 19.3% in January 2026, the lowest since December 2022.
- India's crude imports from the United States increased by about 32% between April 2025 and January 2026.

Key Points

- India imports over 85% of its crude oil requirement.
- Around 55% of India's crude oil imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz.
- Rising oil prices increase:
 - Import bill
 - Inflation
 - Current Account Deficit (CAD)
 - Pressure on the Indian Rupee
- Russia has been an important supplier of discounted crude oil to India since the Ukraine conflict.
- The U.S. expects India to increase imports of American crude oil.

Important Facts to Remember

- Strait of Hormuz
 - Connects Persian Gulf – Gulf of Oman – Arabian Sea.

- One of the most critical oil transit chokepoints in the world.
- India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR)
 - Locations: Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, Padur
 - Managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL).
- Global Oil Benchmarks
 - Brent crude – North Sea benchmark used globally.
 - West Texas Intermediate (WTI) – U.S. benchmark.

Relevance for exam

Prelims

- Strait of Hormuz
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves
- Oil benchmarks and global chokepoints

Mains

- GS II: India–U.S. relations and geopolitical pressures
- GS III: Energy security, external sector, inflation and CAD

Key Issues

- Heavy dependence on imported crude oil.
- Vulnerability to geopolitical conflicts in West Asia.
- Rising crude prices affecting inflation and fiscal stability.

Way Forward

- Diversify oil import sources (U.S., Africa, Latin America).
- Expand strategic petroleum reserves.
- Promote renewable energy and green hydrogen.
- Improve domestic exploration and production.

Karnataka, A.P. plan social media ban for children

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are set to ban social media for children to prevent the adverse effects of increasing mobile phone use.

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah made an announcement in this regard on Friday, during the presentation of the State Budget. He did not spell out a road map for the implementation of the ban.

While Karnataka said it proposes to ban social media for children under 16, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu said the government would impose the restriction on children aged below 13.

Speaking in the Assem-



Screen lock: The States say the steps are aimed at preventing the adverse impact of social media use on children. FILE PHOTO

by, Mr. Naidu said the ban is likely to be in place within the next 90 days. He added that the government is also examining possible regulations for children in the 13-16 age group.

It was during a recent meeting with the Vice-Chancellors of State public universities chaired by the

Governor, that Mr. Siddaramaiah had proposed a mobile ban for schoolchildren and sought opinion from all stakeholders.

There has been a public debate on this issue since, and experts are divided on the impact and feasibility of a blanket ban.

Mr. Naidu emphasised

that the government is committed to safeguarding children from the harmful effects of excessive social media usage and ensuring their overall well-being.

A similar ban on social media for children below the age of 16 was made into a law in Australia in December 2025.

The law forces social media platforms to restrict access to children below 16 years of age and violations can attract very high penalties up to \$32 million for serious and repeated violations.

Reacting to Karnataka's proposal, A.P. Minister for IT and Education Nara Lokesh posed on X: "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery" and said he was pleased to see Karnataka considering restrictions on

social media for young users.

He noted that Andhra Pradesh had earlier proposed similar measures aimed at protecting young minds from the darker side of the digital world, and wished the Karnataka government success in implementing the idea.

Student union elections
During the Budget presentation, Mr. Siddaramaiah also announced the re-introduction of student union elections in colleges and universities, after it was banned nearly four decades ago.

He said it would "foster leadership, responsibility, and democratic values among students". Both have been much-debated contentious issues.

- Encourage healthy development and balanced technology use.

• Global Example

- Australia enacted a 2025 law banning social media for children under 16 with penalties up to \$32 million for repeated violations by platforms.

Static Points

- Article 21A – Right to Education for children aged 6–14 years.
- Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of speech and expression (subject to reasonable restrictions).
- Article 39(f) – State must ensure children develop in conditions of freedom and dignity.
- Information Technology Act, 2000 regulates intermediaries and online platforms.
- Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 addresses online exploitation of children.
- National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 promotes responsible digital technology use in education.

Critical Analysis

Benefits

- Reduces digital addiction and excessive screen time among children.
- Protects children from cyberbullying, harmful content, and misinformation.
- Supports mental health and social development.

Challenges

- Age verification difficulties on social media platforms.
- Possible infringement on freedom of expression and access to information.
- Enforcement issues due to VPNs or fake accounts.
- Social media also provides educational and communication benefits.

Way Forward

- Introduce robust age-verification mechanisms on digital platforms.
- Promote digital literacy and responsible online behaviour among children.
- Encourage parental supervision and school awareness programmes.
- Develop balanced regulations rather than blanket bans.
- Coordinate with technology companies for compliance.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh governments have proposed restrictions on social media usage among children to address concerns about mobile phone addiction, cyber risks, and mental health issues.
- Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah announced in the State Budget that the government proposes a ban on social media for children below 16 years.
- Andhra Pradesh CM N. Chandrababu Naidu announced that the state will ban social media access for children below 13 years, with possible regulations for the 13–16 age group within 90 days.
- The proposal aims to protect children from harmful online content, cyberbullying, and digital addiction.
- The move follows a similar law passed in Australia in December 2025, restricting social media access for children under 16 and imposing heavy penalties on platforms violating the rule.

Key Points

- Karnataka Proposal
 - Ban social media usage for children below 16 years.
 - Proposal announced during the State Budget presentation.
 - No detailed implementation roadmap yet.
- Andhra Pradesh Proposal
 - Ban social media for children below 13 years.
 - Regulatory framework under consideration for 13–16 age group.
 - Likely implementation within 90 days.
- Objective
 - Protect children from excessive screen time, online abuse, misinformation, and mental health risks.

Rights, justice, action for India's women farmers

On March 8, 2026, women and girls around the world will demand equal rights, and equal justice to enforce, exercise, and enjoy them, to mark International Women's Day. The theme aligns closely with 2026 also being observed as the International Year of the Woman Farmer.

Legal reforms, including equal inheritance rights for daughters, have not translated into matching gains on the ground. In most rural households, land and property remain registered in men's names. Social norms, patrilineal inheritance practices, limited legal awareness and administrative hurdles keep women's names off land records. The woman who manages daily farm operations and negotiates with input dealers and labourers often does so without the legal standing that a land title would confer.

Without titles or formal recognition as farmers, women face systemic barriers to accessing institutional credit, irrigation schemes, agricultural extension services, climate-resilient technologies and many flagship programmes that hinge on documentation. When eligibility is linked to assets they do not own, exclusion is built into the design.

Given that women's access to and control over cultivable land remains abysmally low day to a combination of social, legal and cultural factors, their labour and contributions remain invisible and undervalued. This disparity between the substantial contributions by women to agri-food systems and their lack of formal recognition as "farmers" underscores a structural disconnect at the core of their systemic exclusion.

Feminisation of agriculture without security
As migration by men accelerates, agriculture is increasingly being "feminised" – women take on greater responsibility for cultivation, risk management and household food provisioning. While, in theory, the expanded role of women in agriculture could improve women's nutritional outcomes, in practice, heavy agricultural workloads, poor access to machinery-reduction technologies, and the absence of a supportive care ecosystem place immense pressure on them to balance both productive and reproductive responsibilities.

Studies show that resource-poor women who experience huge work burdens, especially during peak agricultural seasons, experience severe health issues and micronutrient deficiency. India still carries an unacceptably high burden of malnutrition among women and girls. Persistently high anaemia rates among women of reproductive age, combined with widespread micronutrient deficiencies, amount to a silent emergency.

These nutritional deficits in women have intergenerational consequences. Maternal undernutrition and anaemia contribute to low birth weight, stunting and impaired development



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In children. Diets in many rural households remain cereal-heavy and low in pulses, fruits, vegetables and animal-source foods. The paradox is stark: women who help feed the nation are unable to secure a diverse, nutritious diet for themselves and their children.

Over the last decade, India has put in place an ambitious right-to-food framework, anchored in the National Food Security Act. The law guarantees subsidised cereals, supplementary nutrition for pregnant and lactating women and young children, and maternity entitlements. Several states have added local foods, millets and fortified staples to their diets. Yet, improvements in women's nutrition have been uneven, and anaemia trends are deeply worrying.

Entitlements halt at the threshold
Progress toward bridging the gap between law and lived reality requires gender-transformative approaches. The status of women in agri-food systems depends on addressing systemic inequalities.

Secure land rights, access to inputs, labour-saving technologies, credit, resources, extension services and decision-making empower women to influence agricultural practices, enhance diets and food security, and strengthen their agency. Improving women's agricultural entitlements promotes equity, health, and nutrition.

Prof. M.S. Swaminathan emphasised women's control over conservation, cultivation, consumption, and commercialisation in agri-food chains. However, programme designs often remain piecemeal: food transfers through Public Distribution Systems are cereal-centric, with uneven integration of pulses, millets, and nutrient-dense foods. Frontline workers, overburdened, impact programme quality and community literacy. Digitalisation offers benefits but can exclude those with poor connectivity, documentation or digital skills. The result is a limited right to food. Many women, especially women farmers, cannot fully claim, control, or benefit from them.

From the vantage points of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in India, four priorities merit urgent attention if the 2026 theme is to have substantive content.

First, the visibility of women farmers in law, data, and policy. This can be achieved only if granular, gender-disaggregated data are collected and made available. All agricultural policies and schemes must draw on the definition of a farmer set out in the National Policy for Farmers, which defines a farmer's identity from land ownership and emphasises the activities they perform. This acknowledges the contributions of women landowners, landless cultivators, tenants,

agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, tribal and forest gatherers, and those involved in related agricultural work. Second, women's rights to land and to productive resources such as water and credit must be strengthened. This requires accelerating the implementation of equal inheritance provisions, promoting joint spousal titles, providing incentives to register land and housing in women's names, ensuring gender-sensitive revenue registration processes, and strengthening their role in the management of common lands and water resources. Embedding land and asset questions within women's collectives – can enhance collective bargaining power.

Keeping nutritional objectives in focus
Third, it is essential to ensure that food systems and safety nets are closely aligned with nutritional objectives. Public procurement policies and agricultural support measures should promote the cultivation of nutri-cereals, pulses, fruits, and vegetables by small-scale and women farmers, and effectively distribute these products through public distribution channels, Anganwadis, and school meal programmes.

Community-driven approaches such as kitchen gardens, women's seed banks, and localised food planning, can significantly enhance women's roles in transforming dietary patterns and production practices.

Fourth, women farmers must have access to technologies and extension services to strengthen their agency and decision-making. Labour-saving tools ease drudgery, reduce time poverty, and protect women's health. Equitable access to extension services ensures that women receive timely information, training and market insights tailored to their needs. When equipped with knowledge and appropriate technologies, women can make informed choices about crop selection, sustainable farming practices, and resource management, enhancing productivity, resilience, and household nutrition outcomes.

The MSSRF's experience shows that when women gain knowledge, rights and institutional backing, they become the drivers of climate-resilient, biodiversity-rich and nutrition-sensitive agriculture. The WFP's work in India and globally demonstrates that placing women at the centre of food security and social protection programmes improves outcomes not only for them but also for entire communities.

On this International Women's Day, the call for "Rights, Justice, Action. For All women and girls" should go beyond mere symbolism. Recognising women as farmers, ensuring their rights to land and productive resources, and allowing them to claim their right to food and nutrition are crucial steps toward creating a more equitable, resilient, and nourished India.

- Irrigation benefits under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana
- Agricultural extension services and subsidies.

- Feminisation of Agriculture
 - Women increasingly perform cultivation, livestock management, and household food provisioning due to male migration.
- Nutrition Concerns
 - According to National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21):
 - About 57% of women aged 15-49 are anaemic.
 - Rural diets remain cereal-dominated, with limited intake of pulses, fruits, vegetables, and animal protein.
- Right-to-Food Framework
 - Food security architecture includes:
 - Public Distribution System (PDS)
 - Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)
 - Maternity benefits under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana.

Static Linkages

- Equality before law and prohibition of discrimination (Articles 14 and 15).
- Article 39(a) and (b) – equitable distribution of resources.
- Article 47 – duty of the State to improve nutrition and public health.
- Equal inheritance rights under Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005.
- Definition of "farmer" under the National Policy for Farmers (2007) includes cultivators, agricultural labourers, and allied workers.
- Concept of food security: availability, accessibility, utilisation, and stability.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Legal framework provides equal inheritance rights and food security guarantees.
- Recognition of women's role can improve agricultural productivity and household nutrition.
- Women-led agriculture supports climate-resilient and biodiversity-based farming.

Challenges

- Gap between law and implementation in land ownership.
- Welfare schemes often linked to asset ownership, excluding many women farmers.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- 8 March is observed globally as International Women's Day, highlighting gender equality and women's rights.
- 2026 is being observed internationally as the International Year of the Woman Farmer, drawing attention to women's role in agriculture and food systems.
- Despite legal provisions such as equal inheritance rights, women in rural India still have very limited ownership of agricultural land.
- Increasing male migration from rural areas has led to the feminisation of agriculture, where women manage cultivation but lack formal recognition as farmers.
- The issue is closely linked to nutrition and food security, despite welfare guarantees under the National Food Security Act, 2013.

Key Points (Exam Relevant)

- Low Land Ownership
 - As per Agriculture Census 2015-16, women operate about 13–14% of total operational land holdings in India.
 - Land titles are predominantly in men's names due to patrilineal inheritance practices and social norms.
- Institutional Exclusion
 - Lack of land titles prevents women from accessing:
 - Institutional agricultural credit
 - Crop insurance under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

- High workload and unpaid care work create time poverty.
- Persistent malnutrition and anaemia among women despite food security programmes.
- Digitalisation of welfare schemes may exclude women with poor connectivity or documentation.

Way Forward

- Promote joint land titles and incentivise land registration in women's names.
- Recognise women as farmers based on agricultural activity rather than land ownership.
- Expand gender-sensitive agricultural extension services and training.
- Promote nutri-cereals, pulses, fruits, and vegetables through procurement and PDS.
- Provide labour-saving agricultural technologies to reduce drudgery.
- Strengthen women's self-help groups and farmer collectives for better access to markets and credit.

Balancing innovation with women's digital safety

The conversation around artificial intelligence (AI) has taken centre stage, and after the India AI Impact Summit 2026, in February, India's engagement with AI has heightened. While there is enough to appreciate how the world has transformed in terms of technology and innovation, on the occasion of International Women's Day 2026 (March 8), the need is to focus on "ethical AI" and women's digital safety.

With a steady rise in accessible Internet, women are continuously bearing the brunt of digital threats and humiliation. About 16%-58% of women have faced online harassment and abuse, a number that could rise further. Even as one in three women face physical or sexual violence, abuse against women has now crossed physical boundaries and geographies.

In the physical world, women can take a "degree of precaution", though never foolproof, to protect themselves. But in the digital world, protecting oneself from harm, doxxing and abuse is significantly difficult. This is driven by technology's deep integration into daily life and the anonymity that the digital world affords the perpetrators of abuse.

This is the deepfake era

The rise of deepfakes and the recent Grok AI issue are a case in point. Deepfakes are digitally altered images, audio, or videos created using AI that appear as though someone has said or done something they never actually did. Grok AI, an AI chatbot developed by xAI, is being used to generate non-consensual sexualised images of women.

In India, women endure deep inequalities and widespread violence. With the use of AI and



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Ensuring the digital safety of women must guide AI development and its ethical use

access to deepfake technologies, the traditional and societal restraints of unacceptable behaviour melt away due to online anonymity. While one is not denouncing the use of AI and technology, the dialogue around the ethical use of AI is paramount now more than ever.

No women developers

One of the major concerns about AI and a lack of women's digital safety is the lack of representation of women at the stage of designing AI tools. According to a report by UN Women, many deepfake tools – mostly built by men – rarely work on images of men. According to the United Nations Development Programme, women make up only 22% of AI professionals and below 14% work at senior levels.

This lack of women's representation at the stage of AI development leads to fewer diverse viewpoints shaping innovation. Research suggests that with more women and diversity in AI development teams, the overall effectiveness and applicability of AI increases. It has been proposed by UN Women that if there are more women researchers in AI, then the unique lived experiences of women can "profoundly shape the theoretical foundations of technology" and open new applications of the technology. When this is achieved and diverse expertise is integrated in AI development, the hope is that AI supports and weaves in women as equal stakeholders in the digital world. This should help in creating safer online spaces and technologies, including swiftly removing harmful content and responding effectively to abuse at the source.

Stronger laws to ensure prompt investigations into the unethical use of AI are key to ethical AI use. While Indian legislation attempts to do this to address online abuse, implementation is far from prompt.

The new notification introduced by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology directs that online intermediaries must take down reports of deepfakes within three hours of receiving a takedown notice. Notwithstanding the criticism of the new guidelines and the strong review process, the hope is that these guidelines are a step towards strengthening legislation to protect women from irreparable harm caused by unethical AI-like deepfakes.

Start young

A third way to address the unethical use of AI is to address the issue at the ground level. As one in three Internet users are children, one must accept that they are "digital natives" who are dependent on the web. Therefore, the emphasis on digital safety being taught at an elementary level to children is more crucial than ever. Children and young adults must be sensitised to the issue of digital abuse and AI misuse as seriously as the issue of sexual and physical abuse.

Resisting technological change, especially to AI, is futile and is not a sustainable solution as its integration into daily life is inevitable. However, on the occasion of International Women's Day 2026, prioritising women's digital safety and ethical AI use is essential so that women are not left bearing the brunt of advancement and technology.

- Need for digital literacy
 - With children forming a large share of internet users, digital safety awareness is essential.

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 21 – Protection of life, liberty, and dignity (includes digital privacy).
- Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017) recognised right to privacy as a fundamental right.
- Cyber offences and intermediary liability addressed under the Information Technology Act, 2000.
- Digital empowerment initiatives under the Digital India programme.

Critical Analysis

Positive Aspects

- Recognition of AI misuse and digital safety concerns.
- Government guidelines aim to strengthen platform accountability.
- Increasing discussion on ethical AI frameworks.

Challenges

- Deepfake technology evolving faster than regulation.
- Lack of women's representation in AI development may create biased systems.
- Difficulty in tracking anonymous offenders online.
- Weak enforcement and delayed takedown mechanisms.

Way Forward

- Strengthen legal framework for AI governance and deepfake regulation.
- Promote greater participation of women in AI research and development.
- Develop AI-based detection tools for deepfake identification.
- Expand digital literacy and cyber safety education in schools.
- Encourage global cooperation on AI ethics and cybercrime regulation.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Growing concerns about ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and women's digital safety have emerged after discussions at the India AI Impact Summit 2026.
- On the occasion of International Women's Day (March 8), the focus has shifted to the misuse of AI technologies such as deepfakes targeting women.
- The rise of AI tools like Grok AI has raised concerns about the creation of non-consensual deepfake images and digital abuse.
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) issued guidelines directing intermediaries to remove deepfake content within three hours of receiving a notice.

Key Points

- Online harassment of women
 - Around 16–58% of women globally experience online harassment (UN reports).
 - Forms include cyberstalking, trolling, doxxing, and non-consensual image sharing.
- Deepfake technology
 - AI-generated synthetic media that manipulates images, audio, or video.
 - Increasingly used to produce fake explicit content targeting women.
- Gender gap in AI sector
 - Women constitute around 22% of AI professionals globally.
 - Less than 14% hold senior AI roles (UNDP).
- Regulatory response
 - Action under Information Technology Act, 2000 and IT Intermediary Rules 2021.
 - Platforms required to remove harmful content quickly and ensure due diligence.

New formula

F1 can meet climate targets without losing any of the thrill

Formula One (F1) is currently going through a golden period. It is a fact reflected through record race attendances, viewing figures, teams' healthy balance sheets, and soaring valuations. Even on track, the previous seasons have seen exciting battles. In 2025, the battle for the drivers' title went down to the last race with three drivers in contention. Eventually, McLaren's Lando Norris triumphed ahead of his teammate Oscar Piastri and Red Bull's Max Verstappen, the four-time champion. Now, on the eve of the season-opening Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne, F1 is embarking on a bold trajectory that could define its future. At a time when there is heightened focus on climate goals and a push towards sustainable living, F1, with its fuel-guzzling machines and a global circus criss-crossing five continents 24 times a year, can be seen as an anachronistic endeavour. In 2019, F1 laid out a plan to become net carbon zero by 2030, and starting this year, it will take its biggest leap towards achieving that goal. The governing body, the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), has introduced a new hybrid engine formula for 2026, split equally between conventional internal combustion engines and electric motors. More importantly, all cars will be powered by advanced sustainable fuels.

These fuels are derived from carbon capture, municipal waste, and non-food biomass rather than from crude oil. The battery for the electric motor will be charged by harvesting energy lost during braking. Historically, major automotive manufacturers have used motorsport as a platform for research and development and have transferred technology from track vehicles to traditional cars. The new rules have attracted big firms back to the series. Audi has entered its own team; Honda and Ford have returned to the sport as engine partners to Aston Martin and Red Bull Racing, respectively. While these are lofty ambitions, in the end, F1 is still a sport, and the main aim is to produce an exciting championship. The charm of racing is seeing drivers push cars to their absolute limits and enthrall viewers. During pre-season testing, the new cars received a lukewarm response from the drivers, who felt the new formula did not allow them to push the cars to their limits at all times, as they were energy-starved. Though these are early days yet, it will be interesting to see how quickly the teams overcome these challenges or how the rule-makers step in to ensure that the spirit of the sport is not lost. If F1 can deliver close racing and a competitive championship by this season's end, the gamble may prove worthwhile.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Formula One is undertaking major reforms to align the sport with global climate goals.
- Ahead of the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne, new sustainability-focused developments have been highlighted.
- In 2019, F1 announced a target to achieve net carbon-zero emissions by 2030.
- The sport's governing body, Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile, has introduced new hybrid engine regulations from 2026.
- These engines will use advanced sustainable fuels and a higher share of electric power to reduce emissions.

Key Points

- Net-Zero Goal: F1 aims to eliminate or offset all carbon emissions across cars, logistics, factories, and events by 2030.
- 2026 Engine Regulations:
 - Approximately 50% power from internal combustion engine (ICE) and 50% from electric motor.
 - Significant increase in electrical power generation.

- Sustainable Fuels:
 - Derived from carbon capture, municipal waste, and non-food biomass.
 - Do not rely on crude oil as a primary source.
- Energy Recovery System (ERS):
 - Uses regenerative braking to convert kinetic energy into electrical energy stored in batteries.
- Industry Participation:
 - Major automobile companies returning to F1 due to new technology focus.

Static Linkages

- Carbon Neutrality: Achieved when greenhouse gas emissions are balanced by removal or offsets.
- Biofuels: Fuels derived from biomass such as agricultural residues, algae, and organic waste.
- Regenerative Braking: Converts kinetic energy during braking into electrical energy for battery storage.
- Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS): Technology that captures CO₂ from industrial emissions and stores it underground or reuses it.
- Paris Agreement (2015): Global treaty aiming to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels.

Critical Analysis

Positive Aspects

- Promotes low-carbon technology innovation.
- Encourages development of sustainable fuels for transport sector.
- Motorsports act as a testing platform for advanced automotive technologies.

Concerns

- High cost of sustainable fuel technology.
- Global logistics of races still generate significant emissions.
- Performance concerns from drivers due to energy limitations.

Way Forward

- Improve large-scale production of sustainable fuels.
- Reduce emissions from race logistics and event operations.
- Encourage technology transfer from motorsport to commercial vehicles.
- Align sporting initiatives with global climate commitments.

Aravallis

independent expert opinion must be obtained and considered, after associating all requisite stakeholders."

The apex court's December 29 order also asked the Amicus Curiae and the CEC to assist in the case. Set up in 2002 by the SC, the CEC monitors and ensures compliance of its orders related to environment and forests. Amicus Curiae (friend of the court) are invited by the court to assist in specific cases with neutral and specialised legal expertise.

In his written submission dated February 24, amicus curiae K Parameshwar highlighted the key aspects of the case:

- The Aravalli committee defined the hills "solely on the basis of height, disregarding the FSI's opinion as to the importance of lower lying hills." The FSI report dated September 22, 2025 was "completely suppressed...in the extensive Affidavit filed by the MoEFCC" on October 13, 2025. The DG, FSI's email on October 7, 2025, also disagreed with the definition and provided an alternative definition.

- The CEC addressed a letter on October 14, 2025, to the Amicus Curiae stating that the Aravalli committee report was never placed before it and was never approved.

- The hydrological features of the Aravalli region were not considered. According to the CEC, there is "an immense potential of about 2 million litre ground water recharge per hectare of the landscape."

- In its haste, the committee failed to create any mechanism for public consultation and participation.

- The 100-metre height definition "suffered from an inherent defect" because the com-

mittee repeatedly recorded that "it is for the purpose of operationalising mining alone." This is an incorrect reading of the SC's August 8, 2025, order which specifically recorded that the intention is to protect and conserve the Aravalli hills.

"Having a definition tailored only to mining purposes, ignores that the Aravalli range, although spanning across four different states, constitutes one contiguous ecosystem and ought to be treated as such. Any plan to conserve and protect the Aravalli range must comprehensively address the needs of the entire geographical feature as a whole," the Amicus wrote.

Outlining the consequences of adopting an exclusionary definition, the Amicus pointed out that isolating only certain individual hills would result in fragmentation of a range, which in turn could adversely open up more areas for mining. At risk will be the lower hills, which play a vital role in combating desertification, hills which are more than 500 metres apart, and valleys and flat areas which form part of the Aravalli range.

Going forward, the Amicus suggested the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education and FSI may be directed to conduct surveys of the entire Aravalli geomorphological region to identify and map key ecological corridors and aquifers.

Based on these findings, the Expert committee to be constituted by the SC may determine mechanisms to plan for conservation areas, mining, and other developmental activities within the contiguous Aravalli ecosystem, the Amicus note said.

On February 26, the SC asked the Amicus note to be circulated among the parties and called for names for setting up a committee of domain experts. The case will be heard again later this month.

- FSI objections were allegedly not included in the committee report.
- The CEC stated the committee report was never placed before it for approval.
- Hydrological importance of the Aravalli region was ignored; the area has groundwater recharge potential of about 2 million litres per hectare.
- A narrow definition could lead to fragmentation of the Aravalli ecosystem and increase mining activities.
- The Amicus suggested scientific mapping of the entire Aravalli geomorphological region by FSI and ICFRE.

Static Linkages

- The Aravalli Range is one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world (Precambrian origin).
- It extends across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi.
- The range acts as a natural barrier preventing the eastward expansion of the Thar Desert.
- The Central Empowered Committee (CEC) was constituted by the Supreme Court in 2002 to monitor compliance with forest and environmental orders.
- The Forest Survey of India (FSI) works under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and conducts forest assessments and mapping.

Critical Analysis

Importance of Aravalli Conservation

- Prevents desertification from the Thar Desert.
- Supports groundwater recharge and hydrological stability.
- Maintains biodiversity corridors.

Concerns with Current Definition

- Height-based definition may exclude large parts of the ecosystem.
- Could increase mining and land degradation.
- Ignores scientific ecological criteria.

Way Forward

- Adopt ecosystem-based and geomorphological criteria for defining the Aravalli range.
- Conduct comprehensive scientific mapping by FSI and ICFRE.
- Ensure inter-state coordination among states through which the Aravalli range passes.
- Strengthen regulation of mining and environmental impact assessments.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- The Supreme Court is reviewing the definition of the Aravalli Hills after objections by the Amicus Curiae in an ongoing environmental case.
- On 20 November 2025, the Court had accepted an expert committee recommendation that landforms with ≥ 100 m elevation above local relief be treated as part of the Aravalli hills.
- The Forest Survey of India (FSI) warned that this definition could exclude nearly 90% of Aravalli hills.
- Following concerns from environmental groups, the Supreme Court on 29 December 2025 kept its earlier order in abeyance and sought independent expert opinion.
- The Court directed assistance from the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) and the Amicus Curiae.

Key Points

- The Aravalli Committee defined hills only on the basis of height, ignoring ecological and geomorphological aspects.

War is waged as spectacle. We have devised new strategies of moral evasion

WHEN US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth spoke of causing "death and destruction from the sky all day long" in Iran, it was not simply an aggressive summons to havoc or an apocalyptic prophecy, intentionally or not. It was a reminder of the utter global moral void of this moment.

All wars are terrible. But this Israel-US-Iran war, perhaps more than most, seems to have been unleashed with the sole objective of perpetuating its own fury. This war exists to achieve no aim. It is not a war to conquer or liberate. Even granting it the purpose of weakening Iran is granting it too much dignity. Israel aims simply the continuation of its own violence. The war is about performance: An expression of power rather than an instrument for rational purposes. If it has a purpose, it is only this: To test the next generation of technology — missiles, AI, targeting systems, cyber warfare.

That is why the questions we are asking about this war miss the point. Did we learn the lessons of Iraq? Was there a plan for the day after? Why does the stated objective keep shifting: Is it demilitarisation, regime change, or the break-up of Iran? What can air power alone achieve? Did you anticipate that Iran would climb the escalatory ladder and try to impose severe economic costs on its neighbours?

These questions presume that the war has coherent purposes. But the modus operandi of the Trump administration has been the nihilistic display of power and

spectacle, shifting from one theatre to another. It will break every international law imaginable and flout hard-won precedents: Assassinating heads of state, sinking defenceless ships returning from goodwill missions without warning. The list will go on. The response will simply be the nihilist's version of that immortal line: "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

The overweening nihilism of American and Israeli military power — we will strike anywhere and anytime with impunity — has met its counterpart in the nihilism of desperation embodied by the Iranian regime. The US and Iran have, to put it mildly, a complicated history. Iran became vulnerable in the way countries often do when they become the object of excessive American attention. It responded by cultivating proxies, pursuing a nuclear programme, and presenting itself as an ideological vanguard. The regime was politically odious. But it also converted its defensiveness and insecurity into a nihilism of its own. In retrospect, what is striking about Iran's strategy of survival is that it, too, failed to calibrate ends and means.

After Hamas's brutal attack on Israel, Iran turned out to be a power with all bark and little bite; for all its sound and fury, a country with a simulacrum of defence. Iran, it appears, was the perfect target, not because it posed an imminent threat, but because it was incapable of posing much of one at all. Its performative bluff had long been called out. The wars of



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

The modus operandi of the Trump administration has been the nihilistic display of power, from one theatre to another. It will break every international law imaginable and flout hard-won precedents

power that the US wished to wage did not need a reason. They only needed a pretext. Iran simply provided it. Iran has now responded, in a final act of desperation, by trying to raise the costs of war by drawing the rest of the world into the conflict. It has embraced the desperate version of "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

And then there is the rest of the world, with its own paralytic version of the same refrain. The moral stunting of the current crop of world leaders is astonishing. Watching Keir Starmer, Emmanuel Macron, and Friedrich Merz exude confusion about their stand on the war is like watching children trip over themselves because their shoelaces have been tied together. The Gulf monarchies are hardly better. Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia and Mohammed bin Zayed in the UAE, after years of senseless proxy wars from Sudan to Yemen, have left their regimes ideologically hollow. Their mixture of ingratulating themselves with the West, while clamping down on their own civil societies since the Arab Spring, has produced leaders who no longer know what they stand for.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi does no better. This war has revealed the degree to which India has become a supplicant to American demands. If one believes that Modi's embrace of Netanyahu or India's tongue-tied silence has anything to do with protecting the Indian diaspora in the Gulf, one is simply in denial

about the vacuous reorientation of India's foreign policy. China, meanwhile, appears paralysed. Part of this may be quiet satisfaction at watching the US inflict another wound upon itself. But more likely, it reflects a deeper limitation: For all its power in a bilateral contest with the US, China still cannot lead an international coalition for peace, or against atrocity. The easiest adaptive preference becomes the same refrain: "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

In the US, there is resistance within the Democratic Party. But it takes the easy refuge of procedural virtue, and debates over Congress's war powers. Perhaps the young have been chastened by the repressive powers of the state we saw deployed against protests last year. We have all devised new strategies of moral evasion.

The real obscenity of this moment is not simply the war itself; it is the normalisation of a world in which war has become performance. But if the great powers have chosen nihilism, the rest of the world still has a choice. The task now is not to take sides in this theatre of destruction, but to refuse the premise that the will to violence must dictate the terms of politics. What is required is states willing to say that aimless wars waged as spectacle, fought to test technologies, will not be legitimised by silence. Or else the chorus of this dying civilisation will be: "Frankly, my dear, we did not give a damn."

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Rising tensions between Israel, the United States, and Iran amid ongoing instability in West Asia.
- The escalation is linked to broader regional conflicts after the Israel-Hamas war and attacks involving Iran-backed proxy groups.
- The conflict has raised concerns over regional stability, international law, energy security, and global geopolitics.
- The situation highlights the increasing role of advanced military technologies such as drones, AI-enabled targeting systems, cyber warfare, and precision missiles.

Key Points

- Iran-US rivalry: Long-standing geopolitical rivalry since the 1979 Iranian Revolution.
- Israel's security concerns: Israel views Iran's nuclear programme and support to militant groups as a major threat.
- Proxy warfare: Iran supports groups such as Hezbollah (Lebanon), Houthis (Yemen), and Shia militias in Iraq and Syria.
- Technological warfare: Modern conflicts increasingly involve AI-based targeting, cyber operations, and drone warfare.
- Energy implications:
 - West Asia holds about 48% of global proven oil reserves (BP Statistical Review).
 - Disruptions can affect global oil supply and shipping routes.
- Strategic chokepoint: The Strait of Hormuz handles about 20% of global oil trade.
- India's interests:
 - Large Indian diaspora in Gulf countries (over 8 million).

- Heavy dependence on West Asian crude oil imports.
- Balanced diplomacy with Israel, Iran, and Gulf states.

Static Linkages

- United Nations Charter: Prohibits use of force except in self-defense or with UNSC authorization.
- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT): Framework to prevent spread of nuclear weapons.
- Strategic chokepoints: Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, and Suez Canal in global energy trade.
- Hybrid warfare: Combination of conventional warfare, cyber warfare, and proxy conflicts.
- India's foreign policy principle: Strategic autonomy and multi-alignment.

Critical Analysis

Implications

- Possibility of regional war in West Asia involving multiple countries.
- Threat to global energy supply chains and oil price volatility.
- Weakening of international rules-based order.

Concerns

- Civilian casualties and humanitarian crises.
- Increased militarization and technological arms race.
- Expansion of proxy wars across the region.

Impact on India

- Risk to Indian diaspora safety in Gulf countries.
- Higher oil import bill and inflationary pressure.
- Possible disruption of maritime trade routes.

Way Forward

- Promote multilateral diplomacy and dialogue in West Asia.
- Strengthen UN-led conflict resolution mechanisms.
- Revive diplomatic efforts similar to the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA).
- Enhance energy diversification and strategic petroleum reserves.
- Develop international norms regulating AI and autonomous weapons in warfare.

Recognising invisible labour of care is a national priority



ANNPURNA
DEVI

AS WE celebrate International Women's Day, we honour not only the achievements of Bharat's women but their indomitable spirit as well. Bharat's story has been shaped by the strength of its women, not only in legislatures and boardrooms, but equally in homes, farms, classrooms and countless other spaces.

Today, Indian women are at the forefront of India's transformation. From fighter pilots to grassroots leaders, they are driving inclusive and sustained national progress. This strength has a historical legacy: From Savitribai Phule's pioneering work in girls' education to Ahilyabai Holkar's compassionate governance, our civilisation reveres *shakti*, seeing in every woman the strength to nurture and lead. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has moved beyond viewing women as beneficiaries to recognising them as drivers of development. This is reflected in policy, governance, and national priorities.

Behind every visible achievement is a silent force: The care economy. The mother who rises before dawn to nurture her family before stepping into her workplace. The wife who holds her family together with resilience, even in the face of adversity. The daughter who balances a day's work with tending to ageing parents. Much of this labour has gone unmeasured, yet it quietly sustains our homes, our communities and our nation. Recognising this, the government is committed to valuing, supporting and strengthening care work as a foundation of inclusive growth.

India's Female Labour Force Participation Rate has risen from 23.3 per cent in 2017-18 to 41.7 per cent in 2023-24. Greater workforce participation and stronger care services can unlock millions of opportunities for women. Budget 2026-27 has made historic investments to strengthen the care ecosystem. The Gender Budget has crossed Rs 5 lakh crore for the first time, reflecting the Modi government's unwavering commitment to women-led development. Initiatives are underway to skill 1.5 lakh caregivers, expand working women's hostels, upgrade *anganwadi* centres for early childhood care, and strengthen convergence across health and nutrition systems. These measures reaffirm a clear national resolve: When women are supported, economies accelerate. Legal reforms such as the Code on Social Security and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code are strengthening crèche facilities and worker welfare.

Rapid urbanisation, migration and the rise of nuclear families are reshaping traditional support systems. The need for accessible, affordable and quality childcare and family services is becoming increasingly important. Investing in the care economy advances multiple national priorities. It enables women's workforce participation, strengthens child development, supports wellbeing of the elderly and creates dignified employment.

In our journey towards *Viksit Bharat*, we recognise that sustainable growth must rest on strong social foundations. The care economy is one such foundation. On International Women's Day, we reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that the invisible labour of care is valued, supported and strengthened. Our vision of a women-led *Viksit Bharat* is one where every woman has the opportunity, dignity and institutional support to realise her full potential not only as a participant in development, but as its leader.

The writer is Union Minister of Women and Child Development

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- Strengthening Anganwadi centres for early childhood care.
- Improved convergence between health, nutrition, and childcare services.
- Legal Provisions
 - Code on Social Security, 2020 – provisions for maternity benefits.
 - Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 – mandates crèche facilities in certain establishments.
- Socio-economic Trends
 - Urbanisation and nuclear families increasing demand for formal childcare and elderly care services.

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 15(3) – Special provisions for women and children.
- Article 39(a) & (d) – Equal livelihood opportunities and equal pay for equal work.
- Article 42 – Provision for maternity relief.
- 73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendments – Reservation for women in local governance.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- On International Women's Day (8 March 2026), the Government of India emphasised the role of women-led development in achieving the vision of *Viksit Bharat*.
- Policy focus highlighted the care economy (childcare, eldercare, household support services) as an essential pillar for increasing women's workforce participation.
- Union Budget 2026-27 increased allocations under the Gender Budget, strengthening childcare, caregiver training and working women support systems.

Key Points

- Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR):
 - Increased from 23.3% (2017-18) to 41.7% (2023-24) – Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS).
- Gender Budgeting
 - Gender Budget crossed ₹5 lakh crore in Budget 2026-27, indicating greater policy focus on women-centric schemes.
- Care Economy Measures
 - Skilling of about 1.5 lakh caregivers.
 - Expansion of Working Women's Hostels.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Higher female workforce participation boosts economic growth.
- Care economy investments generate employment opportunities.
- Improves child development and elderly welfare.

Challenges

- Unpaid care work remains unrecognised economically.
- Gender wage gap and workplace discrimination persist.
- Limited access to formal childcare services, especially in rural areas.

Way Forward

- Recognise and measure unpaid care work in economic statistics.
- Expand affordable childcare infrastructure nationwide.
- Ensure strict implementation of crèche and maternity provisions.
- Promote skill development and entrepreneurship among women.
- Strengthen gender budgeting and monitoring mechanisms.

Bracing for a crisis that goes beyond oil

IN 2022-23, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, India's current account deficit (CAD) hit a 10-year high of \$67.1 billion, amid skyrocketing global oil, fertiliser and food prices. But the situation was relatively manageable, thanks to net capital inflows of \$57.9 billion and some drawdown of official foreign exchange reserves. As international commodity prices eased and India started buying discounted Russian crude, the CAD narrowed to \$26.1 billion, even as net capital flows soared to \$89.8 billion, in 2023-24. The US-Israel versus Iran war offers no such relief. Capital flows fell to \$18 billion in 2024-25 and have turned negative (minus \$581 million) for the April-December 2025 period. India, thus, had a capital account problem before this war began: Foreign portfolio investors made net sales of \$18.9 billion in Indian equities last year and \$3.8 billion so far in 2026.

The current war, moreover, unlike Russia-Ukraine, is being fought far closer to home. India's exports of goods to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other West Asian countries were valued at over \$65.5 billion, and imports, mainly of petroleum and fertilisers, at \$154.6 billion in 2024-25. Further, there are nearly 8.9 million overseas Indians in the six GCC states alone and they account for some 38 per cent of the private remittances of \$135.4 billion received by the country during the last fiscal. The GCC countries have also emerged as a major source of foreign direct investment into India, across sectors, from energy and infrastructure to retail and data centres. Given the level of integration and flow of goods, labour and capital, any cataclysmic event in this region has huge consequences for India. The impact would be both on merchandise trade (especially from higher imported oil and gas prices) and invisibles (from lower remittance receipts), adding to the already weak capital flows.

India will seek to soften the blow for now by sourcing more Russian oil; that would have happened even without the 30-day "temporary waiver" from US sanctions. But this is a crisis that goes beyond oil, with the potential for dislocation far greater than from Russia-Ukraine. West Asia is today part of India's extended neighbourhood, vital to its energy security and hosting a massive diaspora contributing equally to the region's development and economic stability to families back home. India cannot afford to be indifferent. The Narendra Modi government must take the Opposition and Parliament into confidence, like it did during Covid and Operation Sindoor.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- The ongoing U.S.–Israel vs Iran conflict in West Asia raises concerns for India's external sector due to the region's importance for energy supply, trade, remittances, and investment.
- Earlier, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine (2022), India's Current Account Deficit (CAD) widened due to high global prices of oil, fertilisers, and food.
- The situation improved later due to discounted Russian crude and strong capital inflows.
- However, before the current West Asia conflict began, capital flows to India had already weakened, increasing vulnerability to external shocks.

Key Points

- Current Account Deficit (CAD):
 - 2023–24: CAD narrowed to \$26.1 billion after easing commodity prices.
- Capital Flows:
 - Net capital inflows were \$57.9 billion (2022–23) and \$89.8 billion (2023–24).
 - Declined to \$18 billion in 2024–25.
 - Turned negative (-\$581 million) during April–December 2025.
- Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPI):
 - Net sale of \$18.9 billion in Indian equities in 2025.
 - Additional \$3.8 billion sold in 2026 so far.

- Trade with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC):
 - India's exports to GCC and West Asia: \$65.5 billion (2024–25).
 - Imports from the region (mainly petroleum and fertilisers): \$154.6 billion.
- Indian Diaspora:
 - Around 8.9 million Indians live in GCC countries.
- Remittances:
 - India received \$135.4 billion remittances in the last fiscal.
 - GCC countries contribute about 38% of these remittances.
- Investment Linkages:
 - GCC nations are major sources of FDI in sectors like energy, infrastructure, retail, and data centres.
- Potential Impact of Conflict:
 - Increase in oil and gas prices.
 - Disruption of trade and shipping routes.
 - Possible decline in remittances and capital inflows.

Static Linkages

- Balance of Payments (BoP) consists of Current Account and Capital/Financial Account.
- Current Account Deficit occurs when imports exceed exports.
- India imports over 85% of its crude oil requirement.
- Remittances form part of "invisibles" in the current account.
- Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members: Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman.

Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Possible oil price shock increasing India's import bill.
- Weak capital inflows may cause currency volatility.
- Remittance decline if Gulf economies slow down.
- Risks to Indian diaspora safety in conflict regions.

Opportunities

- Diversification of energy sources and suppliers.
- Strengthening strategic petroleum reserves.
- Expansion of renewable energy to reduce oil dependence.

Way Forward

- Diversify crude oil imports and strengthen energy security strategy.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR).
- Strengthen diaspora protection and evacuation mechanisms.
- Promote renewable energy and green hydrogen.
- Encourage stable FDI inflows over volatile portfolio investments.

Policy must catch up with breast cancer burden

AN ANALYSIS in *The Lancet Oncology*, drawing on data from the Global Burden of Disease study, has revealed that the incidence of breast cancer in India has more than doubled over the past three decades. It is now the most commonly diagnosed cancer affecting Indian women. The age-standardised incidence of breast cancer has increased from 13 cases per 1 lakh women in 1990 to 29.4 per 1 lakh in 2023. The mortality rate has also climbed significantly, from 8.9 to 15.5 per 1 lakh women, marking a 74 per cent increase. The data points to a mounting public health challenge.

The bleakness of the statistics, however, obscures an important fact: Advancement in surgery and therapies has transformed survival prospects if detected early. In high-income countries, widespread screening and public awareness have helped stabilise mortality rates. India's challenge is to replicate those gains in a health system that serves a vast and diverse population with limited resources. As economic growth reshapes lifestyles and reproductive patterns, cases have climbed, especially in cities, and increasingly among women in the age group between 20 and 54. Delayed childbirth, lifestyle changes and rising metabolic risk factors such as high blood sugar and obesity have contributed to this shift. Early detection remains patchy; mammography rates are strikingly low — data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) and Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI Wave 1) show that only 1.3 per cent of women aged 45 years and above have undergone a mammography. Many women seek medical attention only when the disease has progressed considerably.

Screening must reach millions of women across villages and cities, awareness campaigns must challenge stigma and delay, and diagnostic and treatment services must expand. Experts also argue that India has an opportunity to rethink its screening strategy and opt for a more targeted approach — identifying women at higher risk through family history, reproductive factors, among others. Even though the national cancer registry covers only about 10 to 15 per cent of the total population, with its expanding digital health infrastructure, India has the capacity to build an expansive risk-adapted model. Success with polio eradication and the Covid vaccination shows India can implement large, decentralised public health programmes effectively. The real test is whether policy can move as quickly as the disease.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- A recent analysis published in *The Lancet Oncology* shows that breast cancer incidence in India has more than doubled in the last three decades.
- Breast cancer has become the most commonly diagnosed cancer among Indian women.
- The study highlights a rapid rise in both incidence and mortality, indicating a growing public health challenge.
- Experts emphasise that early detection and screening remain weak in India, leading to late diagnosis and higher mortality.

Key Points

- **Incidence Rate**
 - Increased from 13 cases per lakh women (1990) to 29.4 per lakh women (2023).
- **Mortality Rate**
 - Increased from 8.9 per lakh women (1990) to 15.5 per lakh women (2023).
 - Nearly 74% increase in mortality.
- **Age Group Affected**
 - Rising cases among women aged 20–54 years, particularly in urban areas.
- **Low Screening Coverage**
 - NFHS-5 and LASI Wave-1 data show only 1.3% of women aged 45+ have undergone mammography.
- **Major Risk Factors**
 - Delayed childbirth

- Urban lifestyle changes
- Obesity and metabolic disorders
- Rising blood sugar levels
- Reduced physical activity
- **Cancer Data Coverage**
 - National Cancer Registry Programme (NCRP) covers only 10–15% of India's population.
- **Treatment Outlook**
 - Advances in surgery, radiotherapy and targeted therapy significantly improve survival if detected early.

Static Linkages

- Cancer is a major Non-Communicable Disease (NCD).
- NCD control is part of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-3): Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being.
- India runs the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS).
- Ayushman Bharat – PMJAY provides financial protection for major illnesses including cancer.
- National Family Health Survey (NFHS) provides health and demographic indicators.

Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Low awareness and social stigma delay diagnosis.
- Limited screening infrastructure in rural areas.
- Shortage of oncologists and diagnostic facilities.
- High treatment costs and unequal access to healthcare.
- Urban lifestyle changes increasing NCD burden.

Opportunities

- Digital health platforms can enable risk-based screening systems.
- Community health workers (ASHA/ANM) can support early detection campaigns.
- India's experience with large-scale public health programmes (polio eradication, COVID vaccination) can be replicated.

Way Forward

- Expand population-level screening programmes for breast cancer.
- Promote awareness campaigns on early symptoms and self-examination.
- Strengthen district-level cancer screening and diagnostic centres.
- Use digital health records and AI-based risk prediction for targeted screening.
- Improve cancer registry coverage for better policy planning.
- Integrate cancer screening with primary healthcare under Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres.