

DAILY NEWSP APER ANALYSIS

DATE - 12/03/2026

**SOURCE
THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS**

**CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

Global energy concerns mount as Iran hits ships

Three crew members missing from India-bound Thai cargo ship struck in the Strait of Hormuz

New Delhi deplors attacks on ships; Iran warns of targeting financial institutions in West Asia

International Energy Agency members to unlock 400 million barrels of oil from their reserves

Associated Press
DUBAI/NEW DELHI

Iran attacked commercial ships across the Persian Gulf and targeted Dubai International Airport in the UAE on Wednesday, escalating a campaign of squeezing the oil-rich region as global energy concerns mounted and American and Israeli air strikes pounded the Islamic Republic.

Authorities were searching for three crew members from India-bound Thai cargo ship *Mayuree Naree*, which was set ablaze off the Oman coast in the Strait of Hormuz after a projectile strike. The Omani Navy rescued 20 from the vessel, according to Thailand's Marine Department.

Taking note of the attack on the ship which was on its way to Kandla in Gujarat, the External Affairs Ministry said it "deplors the fact that commercial shipping is being made a target of military attacks." "Precious lives, including of Indian citizens, have already been lost in multiple such attacks in the ear-

ly phase of this conflict and the intensity and lethality of the attacks only seems to be increasing", the Ministry said in a statement, adding that targeting commercial shipping and endangering innocent civilian crew members must be avoided.

Four injured

Four people were wounded in Dubai when two Iranian drones hit near the airport, but flights continued, the Dubai Media Office said.

The U.K. Maritime Trade Operations centre, run by the British military, reported an attack on a container ship off the UAE, saying the "extent of the damage is currently unknown but under investigation by the crew."

Separately, Kuwait said its defences downed eight drones and Saudi Arabia said it intercepted five heading toward its Shaybah oil field.

Iran's joint military command said it would target financial institutions in West Asia after the state-run IRNA news agency reported that the state-



Targeted vessel: Smoke rising from the Thai carrier *Mayuree Naree* near the Strait of Hormuz off the Oman coast after an attack on Wednesday.

owned Bank Sepah in Tehran, sanctioned by the U.S. over funding armed forces, came under attack early on Wednesday, killing staffers. That would put at risk particularly Dubai which is home to many international financial institutions, as well as Saudi Arabia and the island kingdom of Bahrain.

The ship attacks follow intense American airstrikes targeting Iranian Navy assets and the port ci-

ty of Bandar Abbas on Tuesday.

Oil prices remained well below Monday's peaks but the price of Brent crude, the international standard, was still up some 20% on Wednesday from when the war began, and consumers around the world were already feeling the consequences. In an attempt to manage price jumps, the International Energy Agency said its member countries would unlock 400

million barrels of oil from their reserves, the biggest such release ever.

Ripple effect

Iran has effectively stopped cargo traffic in the narrow strait through which about a fifth of all oil is shipped.

It has also targeted oil fields and refineries in Gulf Arab nations, aiming at generating enough global economic pain to pressure the U.S. and Israel to end

'LPG output up 25%, Centre to address issues'

NEW DELHI India's production of liquefied petroleum gas has increased 25% since the Centre instituted the supply maintenance order on March 8, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas said on Wednesday. The Centre was also working to expand the coverage of delivery authentication code system to 90% of domestic consumers to address issues relating to diversion at the distributor level, she said. > PAGE 12

their strikes.

Witnesses reported continuous airstrikes hitting Tehran after Israel said it had renewed its attacks.

Explosions were also heard in Beirut and in southern Lebanon after Israel said it was hitting targets connected to Iran-backed Hezbollah militants.

The attacks in Lebanon set a building ablaze in central Beirut's densely populated Aicha Bakkar

area, engulfing the top two floors. Lebanon's Health Ministry said four people were wounded.

Israel also warned of Iranian attacks, and sirens rang out in Tel Aviv and elsewhere, but there were no immediate reports of casualties.

Saudi Arabia said it had destroyed six ballistic missiles launched toward Prince Sultan Air Base, a major U.S.- and Saudi-operated facility, and intercepted two drones over the eastern city of Hafar al-Batin.

The U.S. military said on Tuesday it had destroyed 16 Iranian minelayers near the Strait of Hormuz, though U.S. President Donald Trump said in social media posts that there were no reports yet of Iran mining the passage.

If the strait is mined, it could take at least weeks to clean it up once the conflict is over.

(With inputs from Kallol Bhattacharjee)

NO NEED TO PANIC: PM > PAGE 5 MORE REPORTS ON > PAGES 12 & 14

- Gulf countries strengthened air defence and maritime security.
- Rising oil prices may affect global inflation and energy-importing countries like India.

Static Linkages

- The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- It lies between Iran and Oman (Musandam Peninsula).
- International straits used for navigation are governed by UNCLOS provisions on transit passage.
- India imports over 85% of its crude oil requirements, largely from West Asia.
- India maintains Strategic Petroleum Reserves at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur to manage supply shocks.

Critical Points for Exam

- Energy security risk: Disruption in oil supply routes may increase India's import bill.
- Strategic chokepoint vulnerability: Strait of Hormuz is critical for global energy trade.
- Regional instability: Escalation may involve multiple West Asian countries.
- Impact on Indian diaspora and seafarers working in the Gulf region.
- Global inflationary pressure due to rising oil prices.

Way Forward

- Diversify oil import sources and expand renewable energy.
- Strengthen strategic petroleum reserves.
- Enhance naval cooperation for maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Promote diplomatic engagement to de-escalate West Asian conflicts.
- Improve safety mechanisms for Indian seafarers and diaspora.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Iran attacked commercial ships in the Persian Gulf and launched drone strikes near Dubai International Airport (UAE) during the ongoing Iran-U.S.-Israel conflict.
- A Thai cargo vessel (*Mayuree Naree*) bound for Kandla Port, Gujarat was hit near the Strait of Hormuz, causing fire and casualties.
- Omani Navy rescued 20 crew members, while some remained missing.
- India's Ministry of External Affairs condemned attacks on commercial shipping and highlighted risks to Indian citizens working on vessels.
- Gulf countries Saudi Arabia and Kuwait intercepted Iranian drones and missiles.
- The escalation disrupted cargo movement in the Strait of Hormuz, raising concerns about global energy supply and oil prices.
- Brent crude rose nearly 20%, while the International Energy Agency (IEA) announced a release of 400 million barrels from strategic reserves to stabilize markets.

Key Points

- Strait of Hormuz disruption: Iran's actions have restricted cargo movement in the strategic maritime corridor.
- About 20% of global oil trade passes through the Strait of Hormuz.
- The U.S. conducted airstrikes on Iranian naval assets and the port of Bandar Abbas.
- The U.S. military destroyed 16 Iranian minelayers suspected of preparing to mine the strait.
- Iran targeted oil infrastructure and financial institutions in Gulf states to increase economic pressure.

Motion to oust LS Speaker rejected amid drama over Shah's comments on Rahul

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The resolution seeking removal of Om Birla as Lok Sabha Speaker was defeated by a voice vote on Wednesday amid high drama.

The Opposition erupted in protest and raised slogans against Union Home Minister Amit Shah over his comments on Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi's conduct in Parliament, including the time he went to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and hugged him.

BJP MP Jagdambika Pal, who was in the chair, assured MPs that Mr. Shah's remarks would be examined, and asked Congress MP Mohammad Javed, who had moved the resolution, to speak. However, as the Opposition continued to shout slogans demanding an apology from the Home Minister, Mr. Pal sought the vote of the House, which rejected the motion by a voice vote. No division of votes was sought as the House was not in order.

House rules
The House "will be run by its own rules and not by the rules of a party. Rights are to be protected but not *visheshaadhikar* (privileges)," Mr. Shah said while wrapping up the debate. "According to the established history of this House, its proceedings are conducted on the basis of mutual trust. The Speaker



The Speaker serves as a neutral custodian, representing both the ruling party and the Opposition. It is unfortunate for parliamentary politics that a resolution for the removal of the Speaker has come.

AMIT SHAH
Union Home Minister

serves as a neutral custodian, representing both the ruling party and the Opposition. It is unfortunate for parliamentary politics that a resolution for the removal of the Speaker has come," he said.

Noting that the Opposition had raised questions about Mr. Birla's integrity, Mr. Shah contended that this was akin to questioning the country's democratic processes. Mr. Shah said that Mr. Birla had occupied the "high moral ground" by allowing the motion against him to be admitted despite several errors in the document. "The tradition has been that when a no-confidence motion is discussed against the Speaker, the Speaker does not occupy the Chair. In all three previous instances of a motion of removal (in 1954, 1966, and 1987), the House was presided over for 14 days by other officers. Om Birla

is the only Speaker who has demonstrated moral courage," he said.

He also listed data showing how the productivity of the Lok Sabha had increased under Mr. Birla's stewardship, while Zero Hours had gone on for five hours on certain days, and all 78 women MPs of the last Lok Sabha had got an opportunity to speak.

Speaking time

In terms of seats, Mr. Birla gave the Congress six times more speaking time on a pro rata basis than the Bharatiya Janata Party, Mr. Shah said.

"Parliament runs according to rules. Everyone speaks according to the rules. No one has the right to disobey Parliament's rules and speak. To those who say this is happening because of the BJP, let me tell them that these rules were not formed during our time; they have continued since Nehru ji's era. I am ready to debate that Congress has broken Parliament's rules many times," he said.

The part of his speech that elicited protests from the Opposition benches was when he spoke about the conduct of the LoP Rahul Gandhi, who he said complained about not being allowed to speak but was absent from the House on major occasions.

MORE REPORTS ON
» PAGE 5

- Division of votes was not demanded because the House was not in order.
- Parliamentary Convention:
 - Historically, during removal motions, other presiding officers conduct proceedings.
- Past Instances of Removal Motions:
 - Motions against Lok Sabha Speakers were previously discussed in 1954, 1966, and 1987.
- Role of Speaker:
 - Maintains order and discipline in the House.
 - Decides admissibility of motions and questions.
 - Determines whether a bill is a Money Bill.
 - Final authority on disqualification under the Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law).

Static Linkages

- The Speaker is elected by the Lok Sabha from among its members.
- The Speaker remains in office until just before the first sitting of the next Lok Sabha.
- The Speaker presides over joint sittings of Parliament.
- The Speaker's decision on Money Bills is final.
- The Speaker plays a crucial role in parliamentary committees and legislative procedures.

Critical Analysis

Issues Highlighted

- Increasing politicisation of the Speaker's office.
- Frequent disruptions in Parliament affecting legislative productivity.
- Debate over fair allocation of speaking time to opposition members.

Institutional Concerns

- Trust deficit between government and opposition.
- Need to preserve neutrality and credibility of parliamentary institutions.

Way Forward

- Strengthen parliamentary conventions ensuring neutrality of the Speaker.
- Encourage constructive debates and reduce disruptions in Parliament.
- Improve procedural transparency in voting and parliamentary functioning.
- Promote consensus-building between government and opposition to maintain parliamentary dignity.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- A resolution seeking the removal of Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla was moved by Congress MP Mohammad Javed.
- The motion was defeated by a voice vote in the Lok Sabha amid protests by Opposition members.
- Opposition MPs raised slogans demanding an apology from Union Home Minister Amit Shah over remarks on Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi's conduct in Parliament.
- During discussion on the motion, BJP MP Jagdambika Pal presided over the House, as the Speaker does not chair proceedings when a removal motion against him is debated.

Key Points

- Removal of Speaker:
 - Governed by Article 94 of the Constitution of India.
 - The Speaker can be removed by a resolution passed by a majority of all the then members of the Lok Sabha (effective majority).
 - Requires 14 days' prior notice.
- Presiding during Removal Motion:
 - Under Article 96, the Speaker cannot preside when a resolution for his removal is under consideration.
- Voting Method:
 - The motion was defeated through a voice vote.

Judge distinguishes between active and passive euthanasia

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The distinction between “active” and “passive” euthanasia goes beyond the simplistic binary of “act” versus “omission”, Supreme Court judge Justice J.B. Pardiwala said on Wednesday.

“The true distinction between active and passive euthanasia lies not merely in the nature of the conduct, i.e., acts or omissions, but also in the source of the harm that leads to death,” Justice Pardiwala said in a judgment. The judge characterised active euthanasia as causing death by introducing a new, external agency of harm, such as a lethal injection.

“In such cases, death is not the result of the patient’s underlying illness, but of an intervention that sets a new chain of events in motion. It is for this reason that active euthanasia



By removing life support, the physician is not creating a new risk of death, the judge said. AP

is understood as an intervention that disrupts the natural path towards death,” Justice Pardiwala observed in the judgment.

Underlying condition
Conversely, he explained that passive euthanasia should be understood as allowing death to occur. By withdrawing or withholding life support, the physician is not creating a new risk of death. Rather, the doctors are choosing to al-

low the underlying fatal condition to take its natural course by no longer continuing the medical interventions that were artificially prolonging life.

“The undeniable fact is that the patient’s affliction, i.e., the underlying medical condition, is not caused by any act or omission of the doctor. Rather, the underlying condition is due to factors independent of the doctor or their actions,” Justice Pardiwala said. However, withdrawing treatment should not violate the duty of care a doctor owes a patient in all circumstances. “The surrendering of any medical effort must not be at loggerheads with the duty of care which enjoins all medical action,” Justice Pardiwala emphasised.

The judgment said active euthanasia involved a “positive, overt act” designed to curtail the natural lifespan and extinguish life.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Justice J. B. Pardiwala of the Supreme Court of India clarified the distinction between active and passive euthanasia in a recent judgment.
- The Court observed that the difference is not merely between “act” and “omission”, but depends on the source of harm that causes death.
- The judgment reiterated that active euthanasia involves a deliberate intervention causing death, whereas passive euthanasia allows death due to the underlying illness after withdrawal of medical support.

Key Points

- Active euthanasia
 - Causing death through a direct external intervention (e.g., lethal injection).
 - Considered a positive act intended to end life.
 - Illegal in India.
- Passive euthanasia
 - Withdrawal or withholding of life-support systems.
 - Death occurs due to the patient’s underlying medical condition.
 - Permitted in India under strict safeguards and medical board approval.
- Judicial clarification
 - Active euthanasia creates a new cause of death.
 - Passive euthanasia allows natural progression of the disease.
 - Withdrawal of treatment must not violate the doctor’s duty of care.

Static Points

- Article 21 guarantees Right to Life and dignity.
- The Supreme Court recognized right to die with dignity under Article 21.
- Living Will / Advance Directive allows individuals to specify medical treatment preferences in terminal illness.
- Abetment of suicide (IPC Section 306) remains punishable.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Clarifies legal and ethical distinction in end-of-life care.
- Reinforces patient autonomy and dignity.
- Provides guidance for medical professionals in terminal care.

Concerns

- Risk of misuse or coercion in vulnerable patients.
- Ambiguity in medical prognosis regarding terminal illness.
- Limited palliative care infrastructure in India.

Way Forward

- Enact a clear legislative framework on end-of-life care.
- Strengthen palliative and hospice care services.
- Promote awareness about living wills and patient rights.
- Establish uniform hospital protocols for passive euthanasia cases.

Holding up half the sky on India's farms

As we celebrated Women's Day on March 8 this year, we also celebrated the International Year of the Woman Farmer (announced by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization). It was an opportunity to recognise the contribution of working women to India's agricultural economy. As official statistics do not give a complete picture of the scale of participation, type of work, and economic contribution of women, it is field data that we must turn to. It tells us that while women's labour is central to crop and livestock production, the remuneration to women workers is extremely low and stagnating.

Counting women workers
First and foremost, we lack accurate information on how many women are actually engaged in agriculture, livestock rearing, fisheries and other allied activities. Large-scale labour force surveys (such as the Periodic Labour Force Surveys) are unable to capture women accurately because in a largely informal agrarian economy, women's work is often home- or farm-based, unpaid, seasonal, intermittent (even over the course of a single day), and intermingled with care work. For example, a woman respondent may not report herself as a "worker" if her day involves multiple tasks of child care interspersed with animal rearing.

What official labour force surveys tell us is that women's work participation in rural India has risen sharply in recent years. Among rural girls and women aged 15 years and above, 46.5% were in the workforce in 2023-24 as compared to 35% in 2011-12. This still remains lower than the rest of the world, according to the International Labour Office, women's work participation was in the range 57%-63% in a majority of countries.

Hidden behind this statistic that shows a rise in rural women workers lies a less happy reality, namely, that the rise is largely in the count of 'self-employed' women, reflecting a lack of wage employment opportunities. In 2011-12, 60% of rural women workers were classified as self-employed; the proportion rose to 73 per cent in 2023-24. In the same period, the share of women employed as regular and casual wage workers fell. Further, the share of self-employed women working in the agricultural sector rose from 48% to 62%, and, of the total number of self-employed workers in agriculture, women comprised almost one-half (47.2% in 2023-24).

Put together, in 2023-24, there were at least 117.6 million women working in agriculture (of whom 21.7 million were hired workers, 95.1 million were self-employed and 0.6 million were regular workers). The estimated male workforce in agriculture was 127.5 million.

The first sector we consider is crop production. Official statistics cannot tell us the



Madhura Swaminathan
is former Professor, Indian Statistical Institute



Arindam Das
is Joint Director, Foundation for Agrarian Studies

share of women workers in total labour deployed in crop cultivation as gender-disaggregated data on family labour are not collected. We provide an answer with data from village-level surveys conducted by the PARI project of the Foundation for Agrarian Studies (www.fas.org.in/pari). From this unique database of 27 villages, we draw on two villages, Palakarichi and Vermani, from Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu (studied in 2019) and two villages (Harveli and Mahatar) from western and eastern Uttar Pradesh (studied in 2023).

As a socio-economic classification of households in these villages is available, we focus on the peasantry and marginal worker households, who constitute the majority. We have excluded landlord or capitalist farmer households, and those engaged in business or salaried employment.

In the four selected villages, women accounted for about one-third of family labour (except the village in western Uttar Pradesh where it was lower). When family and hired labour are combined, women accounted for the major share in Palakarichi (61%) and Vermani (57%) in Tamil Nadu, and about 40% in Mahatar village of eastern Uttar Pradesh. These differences arose on account of several factors including crop choice and farming systems, and the socio-economic composition of households. Nevertheless, the key message is that crop cultivation relies heavily on women's labour.

The second sector is livestock rearing, one of the fastest growing sectors within agriculture, and where women constitute the primary work force. The PARI village studies show that in family-based livestock rearing (particularly milk cattle and poultry), most tasks are performed by women. If a household owned cattle, inevitably a woman participated in livestock labour, spending about 2 hours for every animal reared. At last count, 40 million rural households owned milk animals (All India Debt and Investment Survey, 2018-19), suggesting that around 40 million women were engaged in animal rearing.

The third sector is wage labour. As mechanisation has progressed and aggregate demand for labour in agriculture has declined, so has the demand for women's labour. Our estimates show that the share of women workers in total casual labour employment in crop production ranged from 16% to 73% across the four villages, but was more than one-third in all but the western U.P. village (where labour hiring is more complex given the scale of sugarcane cultivation). And, these women hired workers belonged not only to manual labour households but also to the lower rungs of the peasantry.

Earnings and wages
For a workforce of more than 100 million, the question of remuneration is clearly important.

What is the level of explicit or implicit earnings obtained by a woman worker in agriculture today?

For wage workers, the prevailing wage rate is observable. At today's prices, a woman worker in agriculture earned less than ₹300 a day in all four villages. The gender gap in wages was higher in those regions with overall higher wage levels. Women's wages (₹290) were less than 50% of male wages in the two villages of Tamil Nadu; in the two villages of Uttar Pradesh, women's wages were lower (₹242-₹226) but so were men's wages and the gender gap was narrower.

Official statistics reveal a similar story. In November 2025, according to the Labour Bureau, the average all-India daily wage for agricultural work (sowing/transplanting/weeding) for a woman was ₹384. There were, of course, variations across States, with women workers in Kerala receiving the highest daily wage (₹646). Furthermore, data show that wages corrected for inflation have barely risen over the last decade.

There are no official data on women's earnings in livestock earnings, and we estimated the implicit daily earning, based on income generated from animals over the year (based on production of milk, dung) and total hours of work. In the two U.P. villages, where milk animals were widely held, the implicit daily earning was around ₹100. In short, women earned only two-fifths of the prevailing agricultural wage rate for their labour in cattle rearing.

Turning to crop production, it is difficult to estimate earnings per worker, as many members of a family may contribute to production. Suffice to note that in all four study villages, the return from crop production was low, averaging less than ₹16,000 a year in the eastern U.P. village and less than ₹24,000 in Palakarichi, the Tamil Nadu village. Even if half the income was apportioned to women, their incomes would not be high.

The picture so far
It is clear that women now constitute about one-half of the agricultural workforce in India (the actual number is likely to be higher for the reasons mentioned above). The majority of rural women were self-employed workers, but only 10% of rural women owned land, the primary asset for a cultivator. Turning to agricultural workers, women workers now (21.7 million) exceed the number of male workers (0.7 million), a first-time occurrence in post-independence India, but wage rates for women are low in absolute terms, with a few exceptions, and reveal a large gender wage gap.

Women workers hold up half the sky in rural India. The Indian state has failed to correctly record the number of women workers, and to ensure that they receive decent wages and all rights as workers.

- Women are heavily involved in crop cultivation, livestock management, fisheries, and allied activities.
- In some regions, women account for over 50% of labour in crop production.

• Livestock Sector

- Around 40 million rural households own milch animals (All India Debt and Investment Survey 2018-19).
- Livestock care such as feeding, milking, and dung management is primarily done by women.

• Wage Disparities

- Average daily agricultural wage for women: ₹384 (Nov 2025, Labour Bureau).
- Women's wages are often 30–50% lower than male wages.

• Low Asset Ownership

- Only about 10% of rural women own agricultural land, limiting their access to credit, subsidies, and institutional support.

Static Linkages

- Equal pay for equal work principle under Directive Principles.
- Minimum Wages Act and labour welfare provisions for agricultural workers.
- Agriculture and allied sectors as major sources of rural employment.
- Land ownership linked to access to institutional credit and government schemes.

Critical Analysis

Positive Aspects

- Increasing female labour force participation in rural areas.
- Women play a central role in crop production and livestock sector growth.
- Agriculture provides employment opportunities where formal jobs are scarce.

Challenges

- Under-reporting of women's work due to unpaid and home-based labour.
- Large gender wage gap in agricultural labour markets.
- Low land ownership among women leading to limited economic empowerment.
- Mechanisation reducing demand for female labour.
- Lack of social security and recognition for women farmers.

Way Forward

- Improve gender-disaggregated data collection in labour surveys.
- Ensure equal wages for equal work in agricultural labour markets.
- Promote joint land titles and inheritance rights for women.
- Expand women-focused agricultural schemes and credit access.
- Strengthen Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) involving women.
- Provide skill development and mechanisation training for women farmers.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- International Women's Day (8 March) coincided with the International Year of the Woman Farmer declared by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
- The discussion highlighted the significant but under-recognised contribution of women in India's agricultural sector.
- Recent data and field studies show that women form nearly half of the agricultural workforce, yet their work participation, wages, and ownership rights remain limited.

Key Points

- Female Workforce Participation
 - Rural female labour force participation increased from 35% (2011-12) to 46.5% (2023-24) (PLFS).
 - Global female labour participation averages 57–63% (ILO).
- Women in Agriculture
 - Around 117.6 million women were engaged in agriculture in 2023-24.
 - Male agricultural workforce: 127.5 million.
 - Women constitute 47.2% of self-employed agricultural workers.
- Growth of Self-Employment
 - Share of self-employed rural women increased from 60% (2011-12) to 73% (2023-24).
 - Indicates limited wage employment opportunities in rural areas.
- Role in Agricultural Activities

Women sustain India's farming economy but remain underpaid and undercounted

Policy missteps

India has allowed panic over fuel availability to spread

The events unfolding in West Asia have shone a spotlight not only on India's energy security, but also on its policy preparedness and communication strategy in times of crisis. With India importing close to 90% of its oil needs, it is natural that any disruption to supply chains would hit it hard. The Strait of Hormuz is particularly vital in the supply chain. To the government's credit, it has been gradually trying to reduce India's oil import dependence. The push for ethanol and biofuels is a step in this direction. Smoothing their adoption should continue to be a policy priority in the near term. That said, India's dependence on imported oil remains vast and growing, with the economy expanding by 6-8% every year. Therefore, measures such as ethanol or biofuel-blending are only likely to be of marginal strategic significance. The policies on importing oil need to become more long-term oriented and robust in the face of external pressure. The crisis in West Asia has shown India just how important supplies from Russia are, at a time when New Delhi had been cutting Russian oil imports due to American pressure. In the past, the government had given in to U.S. pressure over Iranian and Venezuelan oil. The U.S. is now encouraging India to import Russian oil again to steady global markets. The U.S.'s 50% tariffs were hard to bear, but India knew that the U.S. Supreme Court was deliberating on the issue, and, so, could have waited a month for its order. As things stand, India may no longer receive a discount for Russian oil, it has squandered Moscow's trust, respect from the U.S. is diminishing, and a trade deal with it remains distant.

Government officials have made anonymous statements saying that fuel prices will not be hiked in response to higher oil prices. This is as much a political necessity as a moral one. After all, fuel prices were not cut over the last two and a half years even when oil prices were comfortably low. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), providing LPG connections to households, has also laid bare how policy does not anticipate crises. Households have benefited from the PMUY, but the resultant increase in LPG demand – without a commensurate increase in stable supplies and reserves – has meant that restaurants and hotels are now suffering amid shortages. Finally, the policy of the government to so far communicate only through off-record briefings and occasional tweets has meant panic over fuel availability has spread faster than warranted. Tuesday's inter-ministerial press conference came days late and no questions were taken. Clear, accountable communication was needed, yet missing. The government's crisis communication needs more work.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Escalating tensions and attacks on commercial shipping in West Asia have raised concerns about global oil supply disruptions.
- India imports around 85–90% of its crude oil, making it highly vulnerable to global energy shocks.
- The Strait of Hormuz, a critical global chokepoint, is vital for India's oil imports from Gulf countries.
- The crisis has highlighted challenges related to energy security, import diversification, and crisis communication by the government.

Key Points

- Oil Import Dependence
 - India imports about 85–90% of its crude oil needs (Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas).
 - Oil demand is expected to increase with India's rapid economic growth (6–8%).
- Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz
 - About 20% of global petroleum trade passes through it.
 - Major suppliers to India through this route: Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait.
- Diversification of Oil Sources

- India increased imports from Russia after the Ukraine conflict due to discounted crude.
- Earlier imports from Iran and Venezuela were reduced due to U.S. sanctions.
- Alternative Fuel Initiatives
 - Government promoting ethanol blending and biofuels to reduce crude oil dependence.
 - Target: 20% ethanol blending in petrol by 2025–26.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves
 - Storage sites: Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, Padur.
 - Current capacity covers about 9–10 days of India's crude oil requirement.
- Welfare Scheme Impact
 - Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) increased LPG demand by expanding access to clean cooking fuel.

Static Linkages

- Energy security refers to uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price.
- Strategic petroleum reserves are emergency fuel storage used during supply disruptions.
- Biofuel Policy (National Policy on Biofuels 2018) promotes ethanol, biodiesel, and advanced biofuels.
- India is a member of the International Energy Agency (IEA) association framework and collaborates on energy security.

Critical Analysis

Advantages of Current Approach

- Import diversification (Russia, Middle East, U.S.) reduces dependence on a single supplier.
- Ethanol blending helps reduce fossil fuel use and supports farmers.
- Strategic petroleum reserves provide short-term supply security.

Challenges

- Extremely high import dependence makes India vulnerable to geopolitical shocks.
- Alternative fuels currently have limited impact on overall oil demand.
- Strategic reserves cover only a small number of consumption days compared with global standards.
- Policy decisions influenced by external geopolitical pressure.
- Weak crisis communication can trigger public panic.

Way Forward

- Diversify oil import sources further to reduce geopolitical vulnerability.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserve capacity to cover more consumption days.
- Accelerate transition to renewables, green hydrogen, and electric mobility.
- Strengthen biofuel and ethanol ecosystem including supply chains.
- Develop transparent and timely crisis communication mechanisms.
- Promote domestic exploration and production of hydrocarbons.

A seismic decision

India needs a holistic, implementable earthquake zoning framework

The Centre's rollback of the revision to India's earthquake zoning by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), follows a major challenge to the methodology used, which some engineers believe are out of sync with site-based evaluations. Yet, the reversal is driven largely by the massive cost and execution implications, as the decision impacts urban planning, disaster preparedness and climate resilience. The current earthquake zoning exercise is an opportunity to disaster- and climate-proof cityscapes, power infrastructure, dams, highways, and homes and offices as India undertakes an urban infrastructure expansion. Getting the zoning framework right has, arguably, never been more important.

At the heart of the debate lies the scientific approximation of possible earthquakes and their intensities, vis-à-vis the preparedness of the built environment to withstand them. Globally, most advanced economies and seismically active regions now use Probabilistic Seismic Hazard Assessment (PSHA), a dynamic framework that models earthquake risk through probability-based simulations of ground motion. Until now, India has primarily used a simpler fixed zoning model. The BIS's attempt to move toward this globally accepted framework is, therefore, directionally correct. However, some structural engineers and policymakers argue that the revisions, which were notified in November 2025 and withdrawn on March 3, were too stringent. The proposed framework introduced an entirely new top-risk category, Zone VI, covering most of Kashmir, parts of the Himalayan belt, Kutch in Gujarat and the north-east. Urban planners worry that such zoning could stall developmental and infrastructure activity in already economically fragile regions, and potentially push more housing into the informal sector – which already accounts for nearly 80% of India's homes. Estimates suggest that a one-zone increase could raise costs by around 20%, and two zones by nearly one-third. For major infrastructure such as metro rail systems, dams and power stations, the cost implication could be significantly higher. Pushback to the BIS revisions has come from both the private sector and within government, including the Ministries of Housing and Urban Affairs, Home Affairs, the Central Water Commission and the National Dam Safety Authority. Another layer in this debate is climate. The construction sector in India is among its largest dispersed sources of carbon emissions. While a revision in the earthquake zoning framework is necessary, it requires wider consultation across ministries, regulators and industry stakeholders. Only a holistic and implementable framework can strengthen disaster resilience and address climate mitigation, affordability and execution challenges.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) proposed a revision of India's earthquake zoning map in November 2025, aiming to adopt a more scientific seismic risk assessment system.
- The proposal introduced a new high-risk seismic category (Zone VI) covering parts of Kashmir, the Himalayan region, Kutch (Gujarat) and the North-East.
- Due to concerns over methodology, cost escalation, and implementation challenges, the Central Government rolled back the revised framework in March 2026.
- Multiple agencies, including the Central Water Commission, National Dam Safety Authority, and Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, raised objections.
- The government plans wider consultations before revising the seismic zoning framework again.

Key Points

- India's seismic zoning map currently divides the country into 4 zones: II, III, IV and V (Zone V = highest risk).
- The revision proposed a fifth category – Zone VI, indicating extremely high seismic hazard areas.

- The revised model attempted to shift from deterministic seismic zoning to Probabilistic Seismic Hazard Assessment (PSHA).
- PSHA estimates earthquake risk using probability-based simulations of ground motion over time.
- Nearly 59% of India's land area is earthquake-prone (NDMA estimates).
- A one-zone increase in seismic classification may raise building costs by ~20%, while two-zone increases may raise costs by about one-third.
- Around 80% of India's housing is informal, raising concerns that stricter codes may push construction outside regulatory systems.
- Stronger earthquake-resistant designs would require more cement and steel, affecting construction costs and carbon emissions.

Static Linkages

- India's seismic activity is linked to the collision of the Indian Plate with the Eurasian Plate, forming the Himalayan seismic belt.
- The Indian Standard Code IS 1893 provides guidelines for earthquake-resistant design of structures.
- The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) issues national guidelines for earthquake preparedness and mitigation.
- The Disaster Management Act, 2005 provides the legal framework for disaster risk reduction and preparedness in India.
- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) promotes risk-informed infrastructure planning and disaster resilience.

Critical Analysis

Benefits of Revising Seismic Zoning

- Improves scientific accuracy in earthquake hazard assessment.
- Aligns India with global seismic risk assessment practices.
- Strengthens earthquake-resilient infrastructure and urban planning.
- Supports long-term disaster risk reduction strategies.

Concerns

- Significant increase in construction costs.
- May slow infrastructure development in high-risk regions.
- Risk of expansion of informal housing due to expensive compliance.
- Need for better seismic data and local site studies.

Way Forward

- Conduct extensive stakeholder consultation involving engineers, ministries, industry and state governments.
- Implement phased seismic code adoption to reduce economic shocks.
- Promote low-cost earthquake-resistant construction technologies.
- Strengthen urban planning and building code enforcement.
- Integrate disaster resilience with climate-sensitive infrastructure planning.

Why is India staring at LPG deficit?

EXPLAINER

M. Kalyanaraman

With LPG shortage hitting day-to-day life in India, data suggest while the nation opted for a dramatic surge in LPG use, especially among poor households, driven by imports, there was no plan to boost long-term, strategic LPG reserves in parallel.

With more than 85% of all of India's imports having to cross Strait of Hormuz to reach the nation's shores and limited backup storage, the disruption hit quickly unlike in the case of auto fuels where strategic reserves of crude oil and products are equal to two months of consumption.

The Indian LPG system is designed for operational flow, not stockpiling. And there are no concrete proposals currently to increase large underground storage either. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has flagged the lack of such storage as an infrastructural weakness in India.

Surge in domestic gas
IEA figures show India's LPG imports increased threefold from 2011-12 to 2024-25 to some 20 million tonnes. Imports cover almost some 60% of India's needs. India's import dependency has increased from 47% in 2015 to the current levels.

In FY26, imports had crossed 18 million tonne till January. India's total LPG consumption a month is some 3 million tonne making it the second-largest consumer of LPG in the world. But, the total storage capacity can feed less than half of that monthly requirement and almost all of it in tanks at import terminals such as Ennore.

In terms of long-term storage, India has two un-



In demand: A man sits on an empty LPG cylinder amidst supply disruptions following the U.S.-Israel war with Iran. REUTERS

Total underground storage amounts to 1.4 lakh tonne or less than two days of consumption

derground caverns for LPG - Mangaluru and Visakhapatnam with a total storage capacity of 1.4 lakh tonne. While Visakhapatnam storage was commissioned in 2007, only one has been commissioned since the ramping up of LPG consumption started - Mangaluru with 80,000 metric tonne or just a day's consumption.

The total underground storage amounts to 1.4 lakh tonne or less than two days of consumption. India's daily LPG consumption stands at some 80,000 tonnes with more than 85% going to households.

The country has 33 crore domestic LPG connections out of which some 10 crore were added since 2017 through the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY).

The PMUY scheme sought to offer clean cooking gas to poor people as well, freeing women from the drudgery of firewood-based chullahs, cow-dung and kerosene stoves. The scheme gave deposit-free LPG connections to adult women from poor households and subsidised the

market disruptions and technical constraints," adds Mr. Halser.

India can be broadly divided into three geological zones relevant for such gas storage. The most proven is the Peninsular Shield - the Archean cratonic basement of granite, gneiss and charnockite underlying about 60% of peninsular India.

Both operational LPG gas caverns sit on this rock. At Visakhapatnam, the storage cavern lies 162 to 196 metre below ground level in Precambrian gneiss, using the hydraulic containment principle.

At Mangaluru, the host rock is granitic gneiss, with the floor at 41 metre below mean sea level. The engineering is proven. The rock is cooperative.

The second zone is the Deccan Traps - the vast basaltic plateau covering some 5,00,000 square kilometre of western and central India. For storage purposes, the traps present challenges. Engineers India Limited, designing a new LPG facility on the west coast, has encountered difficulties.

The third zone is the salt formations of Rajasthan's Bikaner-Barmer belt. These halite deposits can be used as cavern storage.

Cheaper, faster
Salt caverns are cheaper and faster to construct, naturally impermeable, and capable of rapid injection and withdrawal.

A refinery is under construction at Barmer and crude pipelines traverse the region. EIL has signed a partnership pact with Germany's DEEP for salt cavern know-how.

A fourth option - depleted gas reservoirs in the Krishna-Godavari, Cambay and Mumbai offshore basins - is under study.

- Storage Capacity
 - Underground LPG storage capacity is 1.4 lakh tonnes.
 - This equals less than two days of national consumption.
- Existing LPG Caverns
 - Visakhapatnam cavern (2007)
 - Mangaluru cavern (2025)
- Import Route Risk
 - Strait of Hormuz is a major chokepoint for India's energy imports.
- Future Storage Options
 - Peninsular Shield (granite formations) - proven storage sites.
 - Deccan Traps - basalt formations but technically challenging.
 - Salt formations in Rajasthan (Bikaner-Barmer) - suitable for salt caverns.
 - Depleted gas reservoirs in Krishna-Godavari, Cambay, and Mumbai offshore basins under study.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- India recently faced LPG supply disruptions, highlighting gaps in strategic LPG storage capacity.
- India imports about 60% of its LPG, and over 85% of these imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, making supplies vulnerable to geopolitical tensions.
- Rapid expansion of LPG connections through Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) significantly increased demand.
- However, long-term LPG storage infrastructure has not expanded proportionately, raising concerns about energy security.

Key Points

- Consumption
 - India consumes about 3 million tonnes of LPG per month.
 - Daily consumption is about 80,000 tonnes.
 - India is the second-largest LPG consumer globally.
- Import Dependence
 - LPG imports increased threefold from 2011-12 to 2024-25.
 - Import dependence increased from 47% (2015) to about 60%.
- Household Usage
 - India has around 33 crore LPG connections.
 - More than 85% of LPG consumption is by households.
 - 10 crore connections added since 2017 under PMUY.

Static Points

- Energy security means uninterrupted availability of energy sources at affordable prices.
- Strategic reserves are created to handle supply disruptions due to wars or geopolitical crises.
- Salt caverns are preferred for hydrocarbon storage because they are naturally impermeable and structurally stable.
- India has Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur.

Critical Points

Importance

- Improves energy security.
- Supports clean cooking transition.
- Reduces indoor air pollution and biomass dependence.

Concerns

- High import dependency.
- Limited strategic LPG storage.
- Vulnerability to geopolitical chokepoints.
- Lack of long-term infrastructure planning.

Way Forward

- Develop strategic LPG reserves similar to Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Expand underground cavern storage in suitable geological regions.
- Diversify import sources beyond West Asia.
- Promote domestic production and alternative fuels like biogas and compressed biogas.
- Integrate LPG planning with national energy security strategy.

Era of gentle trade is over. Global village is being replaced by law of jungle



THAROORTHINK
BY SHASHI THAROOR

FOR THREE decades, the ghost of the French political philosopher Montesquieu haunted the halls of the World Trade Organisation in Geneva. The Enlightenment philosopher's famous dictum of *doux commerce* — the idea that trade "polishes and softens" the manners of men — was the silent engine of the era of globalisation. The logic was as elegant as it was optimistic: If we weave a web of mutual dependency, the cost of conflict becomes too high to pay. We would trade our way to a permanent, civilised peace. It was a beautiful, seductive delusion — the belief that the accountant's ledger could finally replace the soldier's bayonet.

But today, looking at the flurry of Trump-tariffs, export controls, and "Buy National" mandates, it is clear that the era of "gentle trade" has expired. There are more economically and technologically inter-connected than at any point in history. Yet the very ties that bind them are increasingly perceived as sources of vulnerability rather than stability. We have reached a state of maximal interdependence coupled with minimal trust. The interdependence spawned by trade is now seen as a form of geopolitical vulnerability, where reliance on foreign partners is seen as a strategic liability rather than a stable

force. This tension between reliance and suspicion shapes the contours of global geopolitics and geoeconomics, producing a world order that is simultaneously integrated and fragmented. In the place of the globalised world, a more primal, dog-eat-dog protectionism has emerged. The marketplace is no longer a saloon for integrating the world; it has become the front line of a zero-sum conflict. We are witnessing the "de-civilising" of the global economy, where the handshake has been replaced by the chokehold.

The promise of *doux commerce* was that economic interest would eventually swallow geopolitical ambition. During the era of globalisation, we were all persuaded to believe that if Russia was piped into European energy grids and China was integrated into American supply chains, these nations would become "responsible stakeholders" in a peaceful global order, and that if India sold gems and jewellery to New York while importing Harley-Davidsons from Detroit, both countries would prosper. We fell into the trap of the classic Prisoner's Dilemma, assuming everyone was playing a long-term game of "tit-for-tat" cooperation. We thought that by being "nice" (opening our markets, inviting investment and integrating into global supply chains), we would invite reciprocal niceness and enhance our attractiveness as a "strategic partner". Instead, we discovered that the "rationality" of a trading partner is often secondary to the irrationality of a president's prejudices or the assertion of national pride. Interdependence didn't just create peace; it created vulnerability. Many countries that mistook mutual dependency for

mutual friendship came to realise that they had simply handed their rivals the keys to their own front doors.

In the era of globalisation, the golden rule was efficiency. Companies chased the lowest cost, assuming the sea lanes would always be open and the rules would always be followed. Now, that golden rule has been replaced by the "Armour-Plated Rule". The realisation that a single geopolitical tremor — a pandemic or a sudden invasion — can collapse a supply chain has turned trade into a defensive crouch. The West is moving from "offshoring" to "friend-shoring" and "near-shoring". Countries no longer care if a partner is the most efficient or most cost-effective; we care if they are a "friend". WTO multilateralism has been replaced by a flurry of bilateral trade agreements. This is the death of a fragmented one. The cost of this new paranoia will be paid by every consumer at the checkout counter.

The "gentleness" of commerce was predicated on the idea that trade happens in a neutral space, a world of benign autonomous economic actors. Poor Montesquieu! Today, commerce is weaponised. When semiconductors are used as diplomatic leverage and critical minerals are withheld to settle political scores or even the scales in a tariff battle, the softening effect that Montesquieu praised can no longer be found. Tariffs have returned as tactical missiles intended to degrade the capabilities of rivals. We have moved from a world where we traded to get rich together, to a world where we trade to ensure our neighbour doesn't get richer than us, or doesn't "piff" from us through a fa-

vourable trade balance. Trade is no longer an engine of growth; it is a tool of attrition, designed to starve the other even if it means going hungry ourselves.

There is an evident tragedy in this shift. While protectionism may offer a temporary sense of security, it abandons the civilising hope of the 18th century. The original theory of *doux commerce* wasn't just about money; it was about tolerance and mutual understanding emerging from mutual benefit. It was about the merchant who, in the pursuit of a sale, learns not just to tolerate but to accept the religion, language, and culture of the buyer. As we raise our drawbridges and retreat into rival trading blocs, we lose that bridge of communication. When we stop trading with countries we now see as "enemies", we lose the last remaining incentive to understand them. We are trading the gentle peace of the market for the brutal security of the fortress. And it could get worse. History warns us that when goods stop crossing borders, armies eventually might.

The era of globalisation may have been naive in its optimism, but the era that replaces it looks increasingly like a world where the dogs are finally off the leash. We are dismantling the global village and replacing it with the law of the jungle, where might is right and suspicion reigns amid widespread fear. We are moving from Montesquieu to Hobbes: A world that is a collection of armed camps, watching each other through the sights of an economic rifle, with their drawbridges up. *Doux commerce* is yielding to a harsh dystopia.

The writer is Member of Parliament for Thiruvananthapuram, Lok Sabha, and chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs.

The realisation that a single geopolitical tremor — a pandemic or a sudden invasion — can collapse a supply chain has turned trade into a defensive crouch

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Increasing use of tariffs, export controls, sanctions, and industrial policies by major economies indicates a shift from free trade-led globalisation to strategic or protectionist trade policies.
- Events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia-Ukraine conflict, and US-China technological rivalry exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains.
- Countries are prioritising economic security and supply-chain resilience over efficiency, leading to concepts such as friend-shoring, near-shoring, and reshoring.
- This trend reflects declining trust in the multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Key Points

- **Doux Commerce Theory:** Enlightenment idea that trade promotes peace and cooperation among nations.
- **Shift in Global Trade Pattern**
 - From efficiency-driven globalisation → security-driven trade policies.
 - Supply chain diversification to reduce strategic dependence.
- **Weaponisation of Trade**
 - Export controls on semiconductors, rare earth minerals, and advanced technologies.
 - Use of tariffs and sanctions for geopolitical objectives.
- **Supply Chain Restructuring**
 - Friend-shoring: Relocating supply chains to trusted political partners.
 - Near-shoring: Production closer to domestic markets.

- Reshoring: Bringing manufacturing back to home country.
- **Decline of Multilateralism**
 - Rise in regional and bilateral trade agreements.
 - Weakening dispute settlement system of WTO.
- **Implications**
 - Higher trade costs and possible inflation.
 - Fragmentation of global economic order.

Static Points

- WTO established in 1995 replacing GATT (1947).
- WTO trade principles include Most Favoured Nation (MFN) and National Treatment.
- Global trade is based on the theory of comparative advantage.
- Supply chains rely heavily on maritime chokepoints such as Strait of Hormuz, Malacca Strait, and Suez Canal.
- India adopted trade liberalisation during 1991 economic reforms.

Critical Analysis

Positive Aspects

- Strengthens national economic security.
- Reduces dependency on geopolitical rivals.
- Encourages domestic manufacturing and industrial policy.

Concerns

- Weakens rules-based global trade order.
- Leads to trade fragmentation and protectionism.
- Increases production costs and inflation.
- Risks escalation from economic competition to geopolitical conflict.

Implications for India

- Opportunity to become alternative supply chain hub.
- Need to strengthen manufacturing, logistics, and trade competitiveness.

Way Forward

- Reform and strengthen the WTO dispute settlement mechanism.
- Promote resilient and diversified supply chains.
- Balance strategic autonomy with global economic integration.
- Expand India's participation in regional trade and supply chain partnerships.
- Invest in critical technologies and strategic sectors.

US attack on Iran is part of a pattern — not a departure



SANJAY
KUMAR
PANDEY

DEAR EDITOR I disagree

A fortnightly column in which we invite readers to tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of 'The Indian Express'

The US is arguably the biggest violator of international law and of Article 2(A) of the UN Charter, which prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state

AN EDITORIAL in this paper ('US, Israel kill Iran's leader, unleash new ghosts,' March 2) claims that the latest attacks on Iran mark a decisive shift. But to my mind, they follow an old pattern: The US has never hesitated to topple regimes that pose geopolitical, ideological, or economic challenges to US hegemony and interests. There have been around 100 such interventions by the US — Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), South Vietnam (1963), Chile (1973), Panama (1989), Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003) are just a few examples. The US is arguably the biggest violator of international law, and of Article 2(A) of the UN Charter, which prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. It has trampled upon the principle of sovereignty and the sovereign equality of states through unilateral military intervention, political interference, economic coercion, blockades/tariff wars, and extrajudicial actions. The abduction of the president of Venezuela and the assassination of Iran's leadership are only the most recent excesses. The US has arguably been operating outside the rules-based order, undermining its own credibility as the leader of the democratic world.

Similarly, the claim that "few tears will be shed for Khamenei" is only half true. While the Iranian regime was losing popular legitimacy, the fact that it could overcome this proves its deep roots and support among the military establishment and certain sections of society. US action may well give it a new lease of life. What is often described as a "rally round the flag" phenomenon allows leaders to shift public focus from domestic failures to national survival. While losses in war can sometimes lead to political upheaval, they provide unpopular governments with (if temporary) legitimacy based on patriotism. The regime can control the narrative and convince people to set aside divisions to unite against the "external enemy". It gains a pretext to suppress dissent, consolidate power and undermine democratic freedoms. One should also keep in mind the fact that Iran is among the oldest civilizational states and Iranians are proud of this legacy. US President Donald Trump seems to have no grasp of this. The editorials in the last 10 days have not adequately addressed these nuances.

For India, there are several constraints on how it can react to the conflict: Energy security/dependency, over 10 million Indians in the Gulf, and delicate ties with the Trump administration. But Iran is vital to India, too. The International North-South Transport Corridor and the Chabahar port are important for connectivity with Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the wider Eurasian region. India's position as a leader of the Global South will also be questioned if it can't take a position congruent with the principle of strategic autonomy. We cannot be seen as bending to US and Israeli pressure. The condolence message after the death of Ayatollah Khamenei should have been prompt. Similarly, we should have responded more decisively to the sinking of IRIS Dana. In view of the upcoming BRICS Summit, we must come out of the "stuck in the middle dilemma" and take a clear position.

The writer is professor, School of International Studies, JNU

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Escalation of tensions between United States, Israel, and Iran following recent military strikes and targeted attacks in West Asia.
- Renewed debate over external intervention and regime change in sovereign states.
- Developments are occurring near the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global energy chokepoint.
- Implications for India's energy security, Indian diaspora in the Gulf, and connectivity projects like Chabahar Port and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).
- Also tests India's strategic autonomy and diplomatic positioning before forums like BRICS.

Key Points

- History of U.S. interventions
 - Iran (1953 coup), Guatemala (1954), Chile (1973), Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003).
 - Frequently debated in relation to sovereignty and international law.
- International Law
 - United Nations Charter Article 2(4) prohibits the threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political independence of states.
- "Rally Around the Flag" Effect
 - External conflicts may strengthen domestic legitimacy of governments.
 - National security narratives can suppress dissent and consolidate power.

- Strategic Importance of Iran
 - Regional power in West Asia.
 - Located near the Strait of Hormuz, through which ~1/3 of global seaborne oil trade passes.
- Implications for India
 - India imports ~85–90% of crude oil (Economic Survey).
 - About 9 million Indians live in Gulf countries.
 - Chabahar Port enables access to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing Pakistan.
 - INSTC links India with Iran, Russia and Eurasia.

Static Linkages

- UN Charter principles: sovereign equality, territorial integrity, non-intervention, peaceful dispute resolution.
- Major maritime chokepoints: Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Bab-el-Mandeb.
- India's foreign policy: strategic autonomy, non-alignment legacy, peaceful conflict resolution.
- Connectivity initiatives enhance trade with Central Asia and Eurasia.

Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Military interventions undermine international law and sovereignty.
- Risk of regional instability in West Asia affecting global oil supply.
- Threats to maritime trade routes and shipping security.
- Rising geopolitical polarization.

For India

- Possible oil price rise and inflationary pressure.
- Security concerns for the Indian diaspora in the Gulf.
- Diplomatic challenge of balancing ties with U.S., Israel and Iran.

Opportunity

- Scope for India to act as a neutral diplomatic actor promoting multipolarity.

Way Forward

- Maintain strategic autonomy while engaging all stakeholders.
- Diversify energy sources and expand strategic petroleum reserves.
- Accelerate Chabahar Port and INSTC connectivity projects.
- Promote diplomatic solutions via multilateral forums such as BRICS and the UN.
- Strengthen maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.

Opening the door, easing the flows

IN APRIL 2020, the government amended the FDI policy to prevent "opportunistic" takeovers of Indian firms during the pandemic-induced economic disruptions. The amendments then, directed primarily towards China, had made government approval mandatory for investments from countries that share a land border with India (LBCs). On Tuesday, the Union cabinet approved changes in the guidelines on investments from countries sharing a land border with India. Now, investors with non-controlling LBC beneficial ownership of upto 10 per cent will be allowed under the automatic route. Further, proposals for LBC investments in key manufacturing sectors such as capital goods, electronic components, and others will be "processed and decided within 60 days". Given the imperative for building domestic manufacturing capabilities in these sectors, the government can be more flexible in calibrating Chinese investments through joint ventures with Indian partners. This will be a win-win for both New Delhi and Beijing. These policy changes, which have been designed to encourage greater FDI flows, ease access to newer technologies and facilitate greater integration with global supply chains, have come at a time of dwindling capital inflows into the country. This underlines the need to facilitate more foreign investments in the country, and for a more comprehensive approach vis a vis the trade and investment relationship with China.

In the past, sections of the policy establishment have articulated the need to encourage investments from China. The Economic Survey 2023-24 had pointed out that to gain from the China +1 strategy, India can integrate with Chinese supply chains or ease FDI from China. It argued that "focusing on FDI from China seems more promising for boosting India's exports to the US, similar to how East Asian economies did in the past". A high-level committee chaired by Niti Aayog member Rajiv Gauba had also recommended removing the curbs on Chinese investments, as per a report in this paper.

Considering the centrality of China to global manufacturing, India needs a clear strategy. In recent years, while investment flows from China have dwindled, trade between the two countries has only deepened. Given that India needs both capital and technology to assist in its development trajectory, along with being more open to trade, it needs to be pragmatic. Its approach must be guided by the need to balance economic imperatives with strategic caution.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- In April 2020, India amended its FDI policy to prevent opportunistic takeovers of Indian companies during the COVID-19 economic disruption.
- The amendment mandated government approval for investments from countries sharing a land border with India (LBCs).
- Recently, the Union Cabinet relaxed certain provisions of this policy to facilitate investments.
- Non-controlling beneficial ownership up to 10% from LBC investors is now permitted through the automatic route.
- Investment proposals from LBCs in key manufacturing sectors (capital goods, electronics components, etc.) will be processed within 60 days.

Key Points

- Countries sharing land borders with India: China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Afghanistan.
- April 2020 amendment: Mandatory government approval for any FDI from LBCs.
- Objective: Prevent hostile or opportunistic acquisition of Indian firms during economic distress.
- New changes:
 - Up to 10% non-controlling beneficial ownership allowed under automatic route.
 - Faster clearance (within 60 days) for investments in selected manufacturing sectors.

- Economic Survey 2023-24: Suggested that easing Chinese FDI could help India benefit from the China+1 supply chain strategy.
- Trade pattern: Despite investment restrictions, India-China trade has expanded, especially in electronics, machinery, and industrial inputs.
- Policy aims to increase FDI inflows, access technology, and integrate India into global supply chains.

Static Linkages

- FDI policy governed under Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999.
- Administered by Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).
- Two routes for FDI:
 - Automatic route
 - Government route
- FDI plays a key role in industrial growth, technology transfer, employment generation, and export competitiveness.
- Global Value Chains (GVCs) are central to modern manufacturing.
- Government initiatives promoting manufacturing include Make in India and Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Facilitates FDI inflows and capital availability.
- Enables technology transfer in manufacturing sectors.
- Helps India integrate into global value chains.
- Supports China+1 strategy, attracting firms diversifying production.
- Improves manufacturing competitiveness and exports.

Concerns

- National security risks in strategic sectors.
- Potential economic dependence on Chinese supply chains.
- India already faces a large trade deficit with China.
- Geopolitical tensions may affect investment stability.

Way Forward

- Maintain strict screening of investments in sensitive sectors.
- Encourage joint ventures with Indian firms for technology transfer.
- Strengthen domestic manufacturing ecosystem through PLI and infrastructure.
- Diversify supply chains with Japan, South Korea, EU, and ASEAN.
- Balance economic interests with strategic security considerations.

On passive euthanasia, over to the Centre

FOR 13 years, the parents of Harish Rana lived in a cycle of grief and hopelessness. A fall from the fourth floor of a building when he was 18 had left Rana with a 100 per cent quadriplegic disability. On Wednesday, the Supreme Court paved the way for a modicum of closure to their emotional, and financial, difficulties. A two-judge bench directed the removal of clinically administered nutrition (CAN) that had kept the 31-year-old alive, but in a vegetative state. The SC had allowed passive euthanasia in 2018. But the withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment, even in cases when doctors acknowledge the futility of their interventions, is fraught with complex ethical and medical questions. Rana's parents had reportedly made up their minds to take the difficult decision two years ago. The Delhi High Court and the SC in 2024 had rejected their pleas on the ground that feeding tubes are not medical interventions. The apex court had, however, given them permission to approach it again. Wednesday's verdict overrules the earlier jurisprudence on CAN.

The judiciary has been cautious about euthanasia. However, it has increasingly come around to the view that forcing patients to remain in an irreversible vegetative state may undermine human dignity. In *Aruna Shanbaug v Union of India*, the SC rejected euthanasia for the nurse who had been in a coma for around four decades. It also held that life-sustaining treatment for such a patient could be withdrawn under "strict conditions", including approval of a High Court and consent of close relatives. The case laid the ground for the landmark verdict in *Common Cause v Union of India* (2018), which recognised the legality of passive euthanasia and introduced the concept of living wills — allowing individuals to specify that life-sustaining treatment be withdrawn if they are terminally ill. Hospitals and families found this procedure cumbersome. Five years later, the SC clarified the role of medical boards, whose evaluations would be critical. Wednesday's ruling is grounded in a medical board's opinion.

The SC has increasingly nuanced the Right to Life and led the search for humane answers to difficult questions about terminally ill patients. But experts have also pointed out that passive euthanasia can be prone to abuse — living wills can be manipulated, and patients pressured into signing their own death warrants. That's why after Wednesday's verdict, the SC asked the Centre to frame legislation. It should not waste any time in taking the cue.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Supreme Court allowed withdrawal of Clinically Administered Nutrition (CAN) for Harish Rana, a 31-year-old man who had been in a permanent vegetative state after an accident at age 18.
- The decision followed 13 years of medical dependence and the consent of his parents.
- Earlier, the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court (2024) had rejected the plea stating that feeding tubes are not strictly medical treatment.
- The latest ruling overruled that interpretation, allowing CAN withdrawal based on the recommendation of a medical board.
- The Court also asked the Union Government to frame legislation on passive euthanasia to prevent misuse and provide clearer procedures.

Key Points

- Passive euthanasia refers to withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining treatment when recovery is medically impossible.
- In 2018, the Supreme Court legalized passive euthanasia and recognized Living Wills (advance medical directives).
- Living wills allow individuals to state in advance that life-support should be withdrawn if they become terminally ill or incapacitated.
- Withdrawal of treatment must involve medical board approval and consent of relatives.

- The latest ruling clarified that clinically administered nutrition and hydration can be treated as life-sustaining medical support in certain cases.
- The Court emphasized human dignity under Article 21 as a key consideration.
- The judiciary highlighted the need for statutory safeguards to prevent coercion, manipulation, or abuse of living wills.

Static Linkages

- Article 21 guarantees the Right to Life and Personal Liberty, interpreted by the Supreme Court to include dignity in life and death.
- The Aruna Shanbaug case (2011) allowed passive euthanasia under strict conditions and required High Court approval.
- The Common Cause v. Union of India (2018) judgment recognized living wills and passive euthanasia as part of the right to die with dignity.
- Medical ethics principles: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice guide end-of-life decisions.
- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and global bioethics frameworks stress patient autonomy and informed consent.

Critical Analysis

Positive Aspects

- Upholds human dignity and autonomy in medical decisions.
- Provides relief to families facing prolonged emotional and financial distress.
- Clarifies ambiguities around life-sustaining treatment such as feeding tubes.
- Strengthens jurisprudence on right to die with dignity.

Concerns and Challenges

- Possibility of coercion or manipulation of living wills.
- Lack of uniform legal framework governing euthanasia procedures.
- Ethical dilemma for doctors balancing medical duty and patient autonomy.
- Risk of misuse against elderly or disabled individuals.
- Institutional capacity issues in forming medical boards quickly.

Way Forward

- Enact a comprehensive law on passive euthanasia and end-of-life care.
- Create standardized procedures for living wills and verification mechanisms.
- Strengthen hospital ethics committees and medical boards.
- Promote palliative care and end-of-life counseling.
- Conduct public awareness campaigns about patient rights and medical ethics.
- Develop digital registries for advance medical directives to prevent manipulation.