

DAILY NEWSP APER ANALYSIS

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**CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

New Supreme Leader of Iran vows to keep Strait of Hormuz shut

Stanley Johny

In his first public comments since becoming Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei on Thursday asked neighbouring Arab countries to shut U.S. bases "as soon as possible", demanded reparations for the material losses during the war, and vowed to keep the Strait of Hormuz "closed".



Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei

"We will exact reparations from the enemy, and if it refuses, we will seize from its assets as much as we deem necessary and if that too proves impossible, we will destroy an equivalent portion of its assets," Mr. Khamenei said. His father, the former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was assassinated in an Israeli-U.S. strike on February 28.

Pledging to avenge "the blood of the martyrs", Mr. Khamenei said the "effective and regret inducing defence" by Iranian forces would continue. "Furthermore, the leverage of blocking the Strait of Hormuz must certainly continue to be used," he said.

3 conditions to end war
Earlier in the day, President Masoud Pezeshkian set three conditions for ending the war. "The only way to end this war - ignited by the Zionist regime and U.S. - is recognising Iran's legitimate rights, payment of reparations, and firm guarantees against future aggression," the President said.

The number of ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz, the critical maritime choke point connecting the Persian Gulf with the Arabian Sea through which roughly 20% to 30% of world's oil passes through, has come down to single digits in recent days as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has targeted cargo vessels in the Gulf waters. There were also reports that the Strait is being mined by the Guards.

"The countries of the region must clarify their stance regarding the aggressors against our dear homeland and the killers of our people," Mr. Khamenei, who is yet to make a public appearance since his appointment as the country's top leader, said, referring to Persian Gulf monarchies who were targeted by Iranian missiles and drones since the war began. "I recommend that they shut down those bases as soon as possible; for they must surely have realised by now that America's claim of establishing security and peace has been nothing but a lie."

Mr. Khamenei, according to Iranian officials, was injured in the February 28 strike, but is "safe and sound". The 56-year-old cleric thanked Iran's non-state allies such as Hezbollah, and said additional fronts would be opened "in areas where the enemy has negligible experience" if the "state of war persists".

'Legitimate right'
During nuclear talks ahead of the war, Iran had consistently argued that as a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), nuclear enrichment is "a legitimate right". This was also the first time a senior Iranian leader called for reparations as a condition to end the war.

Since the war began on February 28, Iran has maintained that it would not talk to the U.S. and accept a ceasefire.

THREATS EXCHANGED
» PAGE 14

- Security guarantees against future aggression.
- Regional Escalation
 - Iran urged Gulf countries to close U.S. military bases.
 - Support from Iran-backed groups like Hezbollah could widen the conflict.
- Global Impact
 - Disruption of oil supply routes could increase global oil prices and shipping costs.
 - Maritime traffic through the Strait has dropped significantly due to security risks.

Static Linkages

- The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most important maritime chokepoints along with the Strait of Malacca, Bab-el-Mandeb, and the Suez Canal.
- Under United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, ships have the right of transit passage through international straits used for navigation.
- India imports around 85% of its crude oil needs, with a large share coming from West Asian countries.
- The International Atomic Energy Agency monitors nuclear activities of countries under the NPT framework.

Critical Analysis

Strategic Concerns

- Closure of the Strait could trigger global energy supply disruptions.
- Risk of regional escalation involving Gulf states and major powers.

Implications for India

- Possible increase in crude oil prices and inflation.
- Threat to Indian shipping and trade routes in the Gulf region.
- Need for diversification of energy sources and strategic reserves.

Global Security Dimension

- Potential violation of international maritime law if transit passage is blocked.
- Increased militarisation of the Persian Gulf region.

Way Forward

- Strengthening diplomatic engagement and de-escalation efforts through international forums.
- Diversifying energy imports and expanding strategic petroleum reserves.
- Enhancing maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean region.
- Promoting multilateral negotiations on nuclear issues and regional stability.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Iran's new Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei issued his first public statement after the assassination of former leader Ali Khamenei in an alleged U.S.-Israel strike (Feb 28).
- He demanded war reparations, asked Arab states to shut U.S. military bases, and threatened to keep the Strait of Hormuz closed.
- Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian stated that the war would end only if Iran's nuclear rights are recognised, reparations are paid, and guarantees against future attacks are given.
- The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps reportedly targeted ships in Gulf waters, sharply reducing maritime traffic through the Strait.

Key Points

- Strategic Importance of Strait of Hormuz
 - Connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea.
 - Nearly 20-30% of global oil trade passes through this chokepoint.
 - Major oil exporters using this route: Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, UAE, and Iran.
- Iran's Conditions to End the War
 - Recognition of Iran's right to nuclear enrichment under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.
 - Payment of war reparations.

India's crude supply secure, no fuel shortage, Minister tells LS

Amid West Asia crisis, priority is to give cooking gas to households, says Petroleum Minister Puri. 20% of average monthly commercial LPG requirement to be allocated by OMCs; Rahul says govt. 'bartered' right to determine ties with oil suppliers

Sandeep Dikhan
NEW DELHI

There is no shortage of petrol, diesel, kerosene, and aviation turbine fuel in the country, Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri informed the Lok Sabha on Thursday, adding that India's crude supply has been secured amid the conflict in West Asia.

The Minister was responding to a notice submitted by Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on the shortage of LPG or cooking gas.

"This is not the moment for rumour-mongering or fake narratives. India is navigating the most severe global energy disruption in recorded history," Mr. Puri said.

Anti-hoarding measure is the "foremost priority" of the government that the kitchen of over 33 crore families, especially the "poor and the underprivileged, do not face any shortage" of gas, Mr. Puri said.

The Centre has also introduced regulation of commercial LPG cylinders to prevent hoarding and diversion, he said.

"In a major decision, 20% of the average monthly commercial LPG requirement will be allocated by OMCs (oil-marketing companies), in coordination with the State governments so that there is no hoarding or black marketing," Mr. Puri said.

Commercial LPG is sold in a "fully deregulated over-the-counter market without subsidy, registration, booking, or purchase limit" which can be a buyer procure "cylinders in any quantity," Mr. Puri said.

Without restriction, such bulk purchase "could have been diverted to the grey market at the expense of genuine commercial



Fuel rush: Motorists wait at a fuel station in Chennai on Thursday as rumours of fuel shortage triggered massive panic buying. © JOTHI MANJUNATH

India co-sponsors UN resolution condemning Iran

NEW DELHI: India has co-sponsored a resolution at the United Nations Security Council that condemned actions by Iran aimed at interfering with navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. **» PAGE 5**

Premature to discuss Iran mod for Indian ships'

NEW DELHI: The External Affairs Ministry on Thursday said it was rather "premature" to discuss reports about India getting permission from Iran for oil tankers and cargo ships to cross the Strait of Hormuz. **» PAGE 5**

Modi discusses West Asia crisis with Puzeshkian

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday spoke to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and expressed deep concern over the escalation of tensions in West Asia and the 'serious situation'. **» PAGE 5**

"Procurement has now been actively diversified, with cargoes being sourced from the U.S., Norway, Canada, Algeria, and Russia, in addition to available Gulf sources," he said amid constant questioning from the Opposition members.

"The House should be clear on this: the rush-buying pressure in some localities reflects a demand distortion, not a production or supply failure," he added.

The Minister said it is a "first time in recorded history" that the Strait of Hormuz, which facilitates the passage of 20% of world's crude, natural gas and LPG, has been closed to commercial shipping for 13 days now.

"Non-Hormuz" sources "India's crude supply position is secure, and volumes secured exceed what Hormuz would have delivered," he said, adding that the share of "non-Hormuz" sources in India's crude imports had risen to around 70%, from about 55% before the crisis.

Mr. Puri said India now sources crude oil from 40 countries compared to 27 in 2006-07. Refineries across the country were operating at high-capacity utilisation, in some cases exceeding 90%, he said.

Domestic piped gas and compressed natural gas for vehicles would continue to receive full supply, while industrial and manufacturing consumers would receive up to 80% of their previous six-month average consumption, Mr. Puri said.

Fertiliser plants would receive up to 70% of their earlier allocations to protect agricultural supply chains, while refineries and petrochemical units would absorb managed reductions, he said.

(With inputs from Supriya Ghosh)

- Anti-hoarding measures
 - Government limited commercial LPG allocation to 20% of average monthly demand.
 - Prevents black marketing and diversion to grey market.
- Priority allocation of gas
 - Domestic households (~33 crore families) given top priority.
 - Industrial sector receives 80% of previous consumption.
 - Fertiliser sector receives 70% allocation to safeguard agriculture.
- Refinery operations
 - Indian refineries operating at very high capacity utilisation (some above 100%) to maintain supply.

Static Linkages

- India imports around 85–90% of its crude oil requirement.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) located at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur for emergency energy supply.
- Major Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs): Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited.
- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) expanded LPG access to poor households.
- Global energy chokepoints include Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca and Bab-el-Mandeb.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Diversified import sources reduce geopolitical vulnerability.
- Anti-hoarding regulation helps prevent artificial shortages.
- Priority allocation strategy protects households and agriculture.
- High refinery capacity utilisation ensures fuel availability.

Concerns

- High import dependence (~90%) exposes India to global shocks.
- Strategic chokepoint vulnerability due to dependence on Strait of Hormuz.
- Limited LPG storage capacity compared to rising consumption.
- Market deregulation in commercial LPG can encourage speculative buying.

Way Forward

- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves and LPG storage capacity.
- Further diversify import sources beyond West Asia.
- Accelerate renewable energy and green hydrogen transition to reduce fossil fuel dependence.
- Strengthen monitoring of LPG distribution to prevent hoarding and black marketing.
- Improve energy diplomacy with multiple supplier countries.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri informed the Lok Sabha that India currently faces no shortage of petrol, diesel, kerosene, aviation turbine fuel or LPG despite disruptions in West Asia.
- Concerns about LPG shortage were raised by Rahul Gandhi amid reports of panic booking and hoarding.
- The issue arises due to geopolitical tensions and temporary closure of the strategic oil chokepoint, the Strait of Hormuz.

Key Points

- Energy supply status
 - Government stated no actual shortage of petroleum products or LPG in India.
 - Shortage reports mainly due to panic booking and hoarding at distributor level.
- Strategic importance of Strait of Hormuz
 - About 20% of global crude oil, natural gas and LPG trade passes through it.
 - Closure disrupted global energy supply chains.
- Diversification of LPG imports
 - Earlier about 60% of LPG imports came from Gulf countries such as Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.
 - India has diversified procurement to United States, Norway, Canada, Algeria and Russia.
- Crude oil import diversification
 - India now imports crude oil from 40 countries compared to 27 in 2006-07.
 - Share of non-Hormuz sources increased from ~55% to ~70%.

SC to study what constitutes 'personal data' in DPDP laws

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to examine what constitutes "personal data" under India's new digital personal data law, which allegedly uses data privacy norms to block the right to information.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said the need to define "public data" and "personal data" has arisen following the implementation of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 and its corresponding Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025.

The court issued formal notice to the Union govern-

ment on a petition jointly filed by journalist Geeta Seshu and the Software Freedom Law Center, represented by senior advocate Indira Jaising and advocate Paras Nath Singh, who said the DPDP laws effectively stall journalists from accessing data of public interest concerning those who hold public offices.

"While enacted under the ostensible objective of protecting personal data, the DPDP laws in effect legalise disproportionate state surveillance, create a compensation vacuum for citizens, dilute the Right to Information, erode the ability of journalists to practice their profession and establish a data protection regulator that is

The term 'public interest' has been deleted from the DPDP Act. Journalists cannot access data which is in public interest

INDIRA JAISING
Senior advocate



structurally dependent upon the Executive," the petition said.

For one, the petition said, Section 44(3) of the Act imposes a "blanket ban" on Right to Information (RTI) applications seeking disclosure of 'personal information'.

"The term 'public interest' has been deleted from the DPDP Act. Journalists cannot access data which is in public interest. A journalist need not have perso-

nal data, but needs information which is in the public interest to satisfy the public's right to information and knowledge," Ms. Jaising submitted.

'No clear definition' She said the Act does not clearly define terms such as "information" and "personal". The state could mount sweeping surveillance on anyone, Ms. Jaising said.

She highlighted how the

Act allowed compensation for illegally accessing personal data to go directly to the government and not the injured person.

"While the DPDP Act introduces a penalty-centric framework with fines running into hundreds of crores, such penalties are payable exclusively to the Consolidated Fund of India. The data principal whose privacy is violated receives no compensation, restitution or restoration, even in cases involving identity theft, financial fraud, reputational harm or dignitary injury," the petition said.

The Chief Justice said a balance had to be struck between privacy and the right to information. One right should not compro-

mise the other, the court said.

"At what point should data regarding a respectable person holding public office be treated as public and when should it be seen as personal?" the CJ asked. The Chief Justice pointed out that an individual's data privacy has to be protected against sweeping provisions of law. "Entire personal data of the citizenry from a substantial part of the globe are flowing into bigwig private entities. Data has become the true wealth of the day," Chief Justice Kant said.

The court asked Ms. Jaising to frame questions of law and scheduled the case for detailed hearing on March 23.

- Observation of the Court
 - Data has become a strategic economic and governance resource.
 - A clear boundary is needed between private personal data and information related to public officials.

Static Linkages

- Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of speech and expression (basis of Right to Information).
- Article 21 – Right to life and personal liberty; interpreted to include Right to Privacy.
- Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017) – Recognized privacy as a fundamental right.
- Section 8(1)(j) of RTI Act, 2005 – Personal information can be disclosed if larger public interest justifies it.
- Global trend towards data protection regimes (e.g., GDPR-like frameworks).

Critical Analysis

Positive Aspects

- Strengthens data privacy protections in the digital age.
- Establishes a formal data protection regulatory mechanism.
- Addresses risks of data misuse by corporations and digital platforms.

Concerns

- Potential conflict between privacy and transparency.
- Could weaken the Right to Information regime.
- Lack of direct compensation to victims of data breaches.
- Risk of executive influence over the Data Protection Board.
- Vague definitions may lead to broad interpretation and surveillance concerns.

Stakeholder Perspectives

- Government: Emphasizes need for privacy protection and digital governance.
- Journalists & Civil Society: Concerned about reduced transparency and access to public-interest information.
- Citizens: Seek both privacy protection and accountability of public officials.

Way Forward

- Clearly define "personal data" vs "public-interest information" in legislation.
- Ensure harmonisation between DPDP Act and RTI Act.
- Introduce direct compensation mechanisms for data breach victims.
- Strengthen institutional independence of the Data Protection Board.
- Develop a balanced framework protecting privacy without undermining transparency.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Supreme Court of India agreed to examine the scope of "personal data" vs "public data" under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 and Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025.
- A petition by journalist Geeta Seshu and the Software Freedom Law Center argues that the Act restricts access to information under the Right to Information Act, 2005.
- The Bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant highlighted the need to balance the Right to Privacy and the Right to Information.
- The Court will examine whether provisions of the DPDP Act restrict journalists from accessing information in public interest related to public officials.

Key Points

- Purpose of DPDP Act (2023):
 - Provides a legal framework for processing and protection of digital personal data in India.
 - Establishes a Data Protection Board of India to enforce compliance.
- Issues Raised in the Petition
 - Section 44(3) allegedly imposes a blanket restriction on disclosure of personal information through RTI.
 - Removal of explicit reference to "public interest" may limit transparency.
 - Vague definitions of "personal data" and "information" could enable broad interpretation.
 - Penalties for data breaches go to the Consolidated Fund of India, not directly to affected individuals.
- Concerns Highlighted
 - Possible dilution of RTI and press freedom.
 - Risk of excessive state surveillance.
 - Lack of direct compensation mechanism for data principals.

India co-sponsors resolution passed by UNSC against Iran

The resolution demands the 'immediate cessation of all attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran' on GCC countries. India prioritises the safety of all civilians, says Ministry in wake of criticism over unbalanced responses on conflict in West Asia

Shashank Mishra
NEW DELHI

India has prioritised the safety of all civilians, the government said on Wednesday in an effort to deflect criticism that it had only condemned Iran's actions, and not those by the U.S. and Israel in the ongoing war in West Asia.



Shashank Mishra, MEA spokesperson

"The resolution reflects several of our positions. We have a large diaspora in the GCC countries, and their well-being and welfare are of utmost importance. The Gulf is also very important for our energy security needs."

On Wednesday, India co-sponsored a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) resolution at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) along with 134 countries that demanded the "immediate cessation of all attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran" against GCC countries including Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan. The resolution was passed with 13 UNSC members voting in favour while Russia and China abstained.

It condemned "any actions or threats by the Islamic Republic of Iran aimed at closing, obstructing, or otherwise interfering with international navigation through the Strait of Hormuz."

"The resolution reflects

several of our positions," said Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randeep Jaiswal at a weekly press briefing on Thursday. "We have a large diaspora in the GCC countries, and their well-being and welfare are of utmost importance. The Gulf is also very important for our energy security needs."

Mr. Jaiswal added, in reference to about 10 million Indians who live and work in West Asia, and India's energy purchases from the region that make up about 50% of its crude oil and 90% of its liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) imports.

In contrast, there are about 9,000 Indians in Iran and India has discontinued its energy imports from Iran since 2020, under threat of U.S. sanc-

U.S. Israeli actions

However, India has not similarly condemned the attacks by the U.S. and Israel on Iran, in which an estimated 1,250 people have been killed, including Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, his family and advisors; the sinking of Iranian ship DRB Dena in the Indian Ocean from Iran since 2020, under threat of U.S. sanc-

bombing of a school in Masha in which 150 schoolgirls are believed to have been killed. Nor has India or the GCC led resolution spoken about Israel's strikes on Lebanon, where the government said more than 630 people have been killed, and 2,00,000 displaced from their homes.

To a question from The Hindu about the seemingly unbalanced responses, Mr. Jaiswal said that the MEA had issued statements, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had made similar statements in both Houses of Parliament that regretted the loss of lives.

"As far as the question of the schoolchildren is concerned, we have issued several statements on the ongoing conflict. We have underlined the need for prioritising the safety of all civilians. We regret the previous lives lost, and express our grief in that regard," Mr. Jaiswal said.

In the past few days, India's "silence" on U.S. and Israeli actions has come in for criticism from a number of senior former diplomats speaking to the media and at various public events.

"Diplomacy should recognise complexity, not reduce it to a single culprit," former Indian Foreign Secretary and former Ambassador to the U.S. Nirupama Menon Rao said on Thursday in a post referring to the Ministry of External Affairs statement, suggesting that India's sponsorship of the UN resolution would "endow a narrative that begins the story with Iranian retaliation rather than the escalation that preceded it".

In an interview to news agency ANI, former Foreign Secretary Kamal Singh said India should have issued a statement condemning the death of Ayatollah Khamenei "to recognise that the head of state contrary to norms of international law has been politically assassinated".

Speaking about the March 4 submarine torpedo attack that sank the DRB Dena "very close to India shores", former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said that India must assert itself in the face of U.S. actions. "Tactical subservience can easily result in strategic irrelevance," he added.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- India co-sponsored a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution backed by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) demanding the immediate cessation of attacks by Iran on GCC countries.
- The resolution was adopted with 13 votes in favour, while Russia and China abstained.
- It also condemned threats to international navigation through the Strait of Hormuz.
- India's stance has been criticised because it condemned Iranian actions but did not explicitly condemn U.S. and Israeli attacks on Iran.
- India stated that it prioritises the safety of civilians, protection of diaspora, and regional stability.

Key Points

- India supported the resolution condemning Iranian attacks on Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Jordan.
- The resolution opposed attempts to close or obstruct the Strait of Hormuz, a key global oil shipping route.
- Indian diaspora in GCC: ~ 10 million people.
- Energy dependence on West Asia:
 - Around 50% of India's crude oil imports.
 - Around 90% of LPG imports.
- Only ~9,000 Indians live in Iran.
- India stopped importing oil from Iran in 2019 due to U.S. sanctions.
- Critics argue India's response appears imbalanced, raising questions about strategic autonomy.

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz: Connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman; one of the world's most important oil chokepoints.

- UN Security Council:
 - 15 members (5 permanent + 10 non-permanent).
 - Permanent members have veto power.
- India's energy imports: Over 85% of crude oil requirements are imported.
- Indian diaspora in Gulf countries is one of the largest overseas communities and a major source of remittances to India.

Critical Analysis

Importance of India's Position

- Protects Indian diaspora in the Gulf region.
- Ensures energy security and stable oil supplies.
- Maintains diplomatic relations with GCC countries and Western partners.

Concerns

- Perception of selective condemnation may weaken India's neutral image.
- Risk of strategic imbalance in West Asia diplomacy.
- Conflict threatens global oil supply and maritime trade routes.

Way Forward

- Maintain balanced diplomacy with all stakeholders (Iran, GCC, U.S., Israel).
- Diversify energy sources and suppliers.
- Strengthen maritime security and shipping routes.
- Protect Indian diaspora and economic interests in West Asia.

Preparing India for a true innovation-led economy

India today presents a striking paradox in research, development, and innovation. Despite unprecedented government ambition, reflected in major funding commitments, regulatory reforms, and improving global innovation rankings, the country still continues to underperform on the fundamentals that drive innovation strength. Headlines suggest momentum, yet outcomes tell a more sobering story: low research and development (R&D) intensity, limited global technological influence, weak research-to-market translation, and persistently inadequate private-sector participation. While recent policy initiatives are necessary and welcome, India's innovation challenge is no longer one of intent but of execution. An examination of R&D expenditure, patent scale and quality, human capital gaps, and the weak bridge between research and entrepreneurship leads to an inevitable conclusion: meaningful transformation will require far deeper systemic change, particularly from the industry.



Gaurav Jain is the founder of Hain Research and an IPR expert helping enterprises, startups, and universities transform ideas into valuable IP.



Mukundan Chakrapani holds a PhD in science and a law degree, with cross-domain experience, and has recently rejoined academia.

A year that holds promise
Following the Government of India's announcement of the ₹1,00,000 crore (approximately \$12 billion) Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI) Fund last year, 2026 has begun with much promise. In her ninth consecutive Union Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman reaffirmed the government's commitment to RDI through a ₹20,000 crore corpus for deep-tech startups, extended tax incentives, and investments in digital infrastructure. A near six-fold increase in funding for the flagship programme, Atal Tinkering Labs – from ₹500 crore to ₹3,200 crore – also highlights the focus on nurturing future innovators. The government's intent is clear: a Viksit Bharat powered by Yuva Shakti. But whether this translates into innovation outcomes will depend on how decisively industry responds. These measures follow closely on the removal of the three-year existence requirement that had limited the access of deep-tech startups to schemes under the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research's Industrial R&D Promotion Programme. Late last year, the government also lifted the blanket ban on patenting inventions related to atomic energy. The Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025 now allows patents for the "peaceful uses of nuclear energy and radiation", which opens the door for greater private-sector participation. Yet, as with other reforms, the real test will be whether industry invests enough to translate this openness into deployable technologies. All these developments coincide with a significant improvement in India's ranking in the Global Innovation Index (GII). India now ranks

38th among 139 economies in GI 2025, and patent filings have nearly doubled from under 50,000 in 2020-21 to over 1,10,000 in 2024-25. While domestic filings now account for about 62% of the total, this shift is both recent and patent-driven, underscoring the underlying innovation base – particularly industry-led R&D – remains shallow. Although these indicators point in the right direction, there remain systemic and structural issues in India from real transformation in research, development, and innovation.

The private sector's shortcomings
R&D expenditure as a share of GDP – especially private-sector spending – is a key indicator of innovation readiness. India invests just 0.65% of its GDP in R&D, far below advanced economies and many peers (lowest among BRICS nations except for South Africa) including Singapore, Japan, and South Korea. In most innovation-leading economies, industry drives the most R&D spending. In India, however, the state still bears a disproportionate share, reflecting the private sector's limited appetite for long-term, high-risk innovation.

Similarly, India's patent filing numbers are impressive in isolation, but are a fraction of the over 1.8 million patent applications filed in China (1.6 million domestic filings) and significantly less than the 600,000 filed in the United States (2,70,000 domestic filings). This reflects the absence of sustained, high-risk R&D investment by India's private sector.

One way to assess innovation impact is by international patent filings, since inventors seek protection abroad only for commercially viable ideas. The number of Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) applications show India's global contribution: 4,547 in 2024, up 22% from 2023. While growth is strong, India remains far behind China (over 70,000), the U.S. (over 54,000), and Japan (over 48,000). Even Switzerland, which is a bit larger than Kerala, filed over 5,300 applications. These examples show that scale, and not just growth rate, drives global technological influence.

According to the GI 2025, India performs poorly on key human-capital indicators critical to innovation, ranking 95 in employment in knowledge-intensive sectors and 80 in the number of full-time equivalent researchers. The situation is more acute with respect to gender diversity, where India ranks 101 among 119 economies in the employment of women with advanced degrees, a weakness that matters given the strong correlation between diversity and innovation outcomes. While the government has acknowledged this gap and introduced initiatives such as Women's Incentive for Developing and Utilising in Scientific Heights and Innovations (WIDUSHI) and Women in Science and

Engineering (WISE)-KIRAN to improve women's participation in science and engineering, their impact remains to be seen. For now, the data underscore that India's innovation challenge is as much about talent inclusion and retention as it is about funding or policy intent.

A faultline
An attribute of India's development trajectory (that is, often equated to the missing "large-scale, labour-intensive industrialisation" when compared to its east Asian peers leading to over reliance on agriculture and services. Even India's so-called new-age unicorns are built on abundance of labour (instant delivery platforms, for example) rather than deep, defensible, genuine R&D-led technological innovation. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that the absence of globally significant technologies of Indian origin stems not merely from historical policy choices but also from a sustained reluctance within the private sector to invest in deep, long-gestation R&D.

Innovation reaches its full impact only when research is anchored to enterprise, i.e., when ideas move successfully from laboratory to market. In India, this last step – the absence of industry-led commercialisation mechanisms affecting innovation remains the weakest in the Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI) chain. While universities and public research institutions generate growing scientific output, mechanisms for technology transfer, venture creation, and risk-capital alignment remain underdeveloped. High-technology entrepreneurship is inherently uncertain, capital-intensive, and requires long-gestation, demanding patient funding, strong intellectual property protection, and an ecosystem that tolerates failure. Countries that lead in innovation have built bridges between academia, industry, and finance. India's opportunity lies not just in increasing startup numbers but also in nurturing R&D-driven enterprises capable of creating globally competitive technologies.

India's private sector must now take up the baton and rise to the challenge of driving India's RDI story. There are visible green shoots in the commercial space sector with several successful start-ups demonstrating strong promise. Deep tech is another emerging area where the RDI fund set up by the government can be a game changer, provided industry positively embraces the opportunity and commits long-term capital. When the GG standard is globally launched in the coming years, it will be telling how many Indian origin patents feature among the standard essential patents (SEP) list. The government has paved the way. But the question now is whether India's private sector R&D will race ahead.

The views expressed are personal

62% of filings are now domestic, showing growing local participation.

However, filings remain far below China (~1.8 million) and the USA (~600,000).

- International Innovation Presence
 - India filed 4,547 PCT patent applications in 2024, up by 22%.
 - Still far behind China, USA, and Japan in global patent influence.
- Human Capital Challenges
 - Rank 95 in knowledge-intensive employment (GI 2025).
 - Rank 80 in number of researchers.
 - Gender gap: India ranks 101/119 in employment of women with advanced degrees.
- Government Initiatives
 - Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL) – innovation ecosystem in schools.
 - WIDUSHI and WISE-KIRAN – encourage women in science and research.
- Weak Research–Industry Linkages
 - Universities generate research output but commercialization and technology transfer remain weak.
 - Many Indian startups are service-based rather than deep-tech innovation driven.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- The Government of India has strengthened its push for an innovation-driven economy through major policy and financial initiatives.
- In Union Budget 2026, the government announced a ₹20,000-crore corpus for deep-tech startups and extended tax incentives for R&D.
- Earlier, a ₹1,00,000-crore Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund was created to support long-term technological research.
- Funding for Atal Tinkering Labs increased significantly from ₹500 crore to ₹3,200 crore to promote innovation among students.
- The SHANTI Act, 2025 allowed patents for peaceful uses of nuclear energy, enabling greater private-sector participation.
- India's Global Innovation Index (GII) 2025 ranking improved to 38th, but structural weaknesses in innovation remain.

Key Points

- Low R&D Spending
 - India spends about 0.65% of GDP on R&D.
 - Much lower than countries like South Korea (~4–5%) and Japan (~3%).
 - Government contributes the majority of R&D spending; private-sector investment remains limited.
- Patent Landscape
 - Patent filings increased from ~59,000 (2020–21) to over 1,10,000 (2024–25).

Static Points

- Scientific temper is promoted as a Fundamental Duty under Article 51A(h).
- Innovation ecosystems require strong industry-academia collaboration.
- Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) are governed internationally under the TRIPS Agreement of WTO.
- Science and technology are key drivers of knowledge-based economic growth.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Increased government funding for R&D and deep-tech startups.
- Policy reforms improving innovation ecosystem and patent regime.
- Rising domestic patent filings and improved global innovation ranking.

Challenges

- Low private-sector investment in R&D.
- Weak commercialization of academic research.
- Shortage of researchers and skilled human capital.
- Limited deep-tech and high-technology manufacturing base.
- Gender imbalance in scientific workforce.

Way Forward

- Increase R&D expenditure to around 2% of GDP in the long term.
- Encourage private-sector investment through tax incentives and public-private partnerships.
- Strengthen industry-academia collaboration and technology transfer offices.
- Expand venture capital and patient funding for deep-tech startups.
- Improve STEM education, research infrastructure, and researcher training.
- Promote greater participation of women in science and technology.

Economic Survey promises, impact of new labour codes

India's new labour codes, with draft central rules released in December 2025, have been presented as a reform with transformative potential. The Economic Survey 2025-26 makes an optimistic case: these codes are expected to increase formalisation from 60.4% to 75.5%, generate 77 lakh jobs, reduce unemployment, boost female labour force participation and contribute 1.25% to GDP by 2029-30. These projections assume that simplifying compliance for firms will incentivise formalisation and expand registered employment.

However, over 80% of India's workers are in the informal sector, and they remain outside most of the labour code protections. The scale of informality is increasing. Firms, when given flexibility, tend to respond by shifting away from formal employment. Between 2011 and 2023, direct factory employment fell from 61% to 47%. Contract workers grew to 42% of the factory workforce. Regular employment in central public sector enterprises declined by 30,000 workers in 2024 alone, replaced by casual and contract workers (Public Enterprises Survey 2025). The organised sector, once associated with stable employment, is shrinking in India. And the new codes accelerate this by loosening regulatory definitions and protections, making it easier for firms to avoid permanent employment relationships.

Formalisation illusion
A striking feature of the codes is how they respond to informality by raising the thresholds for protections. The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code raises the definition of a "factory" from 10 workers to 20 (with power) and from 20 to 40 (without power), increases the contract labour threshold from 20 to 50 workers and raises the threshold for prior approval for lay-offs from 100 to 300 workers. At the same time, the government expects these codes to increase formalisation. This rests



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largely on expanding "fixed-term employment", that is, letting firms hire on short-term contracts instead of permanent jobs. Formal employment has historically meant job security, regular wages, social security and the ability for collective bargaining. Fixed-term employment offers some benefits under the codes, such as appointment letters and equal gratuity after one year, but undermines the key feature that distinguishes formal work from precarious work: job security.

Grey areas

While the codes require platform companies to contribute 1%-2% of annual turnover for gig worker schemes, rules on how companies must contribute, benefit levels, coverage and claim details are all left to be "notified through subsequent schemes". The reskilling fund for retrenched workers follows the same pattern: employers must deposit 15 days' wages per worker. How to access these funds, who provides training and what skills are taught are unspecified. Like India's many cost and welfare funds, collection may happen, but utilisation may lag perpetually.

The Code on Wages creates a National Floor Wage and a National Minimum Wage but offers no clear methodology for setting either and how they will differ. The new rules make space for greater administrative discretion instead. Defenders of flexible labour markets often argue that minimum wages destroy jobs. The logic is that if you force employers to pay more than market rates, they will hire fewer workers. But decades of empirical research have shown that the job loss predictions consistently fail to materialise (Dube 2019). Higher wages reduce turnover costs for firms. And, when low paid workers get raises, they spend more on food, transport, housing and goods. The increased consumption boosts aggregate demand. In labour markets where employers often have substantial power to set wages below competitive levels,

minimum wages actually improve efficiency by reducing employer exploitation.

Further, the rebranding of labour inspectors as "Inspector-cum-Facilitators" might sound progressive, but when inspectors become facilitators helping employers comply, enforcement weakens. This is made explicit by allowing employers to compound serious violations such as wage theft or unpaid overtime by paying prescribed fines. If penalties are lower than compliance costs, breaking the law can become a rational business decision. This is particularly damaging in the informal sector. In the absence of unions, labour courts or workers' awareness of rights, labour inspectors could have been the only channel for redressal. Converting them to facilitators eliminates even this minimal accountability.

There are many assumptions

The labour codes fail to confront what drives informality in the first place. It is not that regulations are too complex for firms to navigate but that informality is structurally profitable. While technology is automating routine jobs, the new platform jobs it is creating are bypassing employment relationships entirely.

The optimistic projections of the Economic Survey rest on assumptions that contradict many of the labour market realities. Making formal jobs more flexible will not lead to formalisation as long as informality remains cheaper and more profitable.

Lower compliance costs will also not create better jobs if firms respond by replacing permanent workers with contract workers. The numbers may eventually materialise, such as higher formalisation percentages, but they will measure changes in how firms account for workers, not improvements in how workers actually live.

The views expressed are personal

- Contract workers form ~42% of the factory workforce.
- Regular employment in CPSEs declined by ~30,000 workers in 2024 (Public Enterprises Survey).
- Fixed-term employment
 - Firms can hire workers on temporary contracts with similar benefits as permanent workers.
 - However, job security remains limited.
- Gig worker provisions
 - Platform companies required to contribute 1-2% of annual turnover for social security schemes.
- Minimum wage provisions
 - Introduction of National Floor Wage and National Minimum Wage, but methodology remains unclear.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- The Central Government released draft rules for the four labour codes in December 2025, signalling progress towards their full implementation.
- The Economic Survey 2025-26 projects that labour reforms could significantly transform India's labour market.
- It estimates:
 - Formalisation rising from 60.4% to 75.5%
 - Creation of about 77 lakh jobs
 - Increase in female labour force participation
 - 1.25% additional GDP growth by 2029-30
- However, concerns persist because over 80% of India's workforce remains informal, raising doubts about the real impact of the reforms.

Key Points

- India consolidated 29 central labour laws into four labour codes:
 - Code on Wages, 2019
 - Industrial Relations Code, 2020
 - Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020
 - Code on Social Security, 2020
- Major changes under the labour codes
 - Definition of factory increased:
 - 10 → 20 workers (with power)
 - 20 → 40 workers (without power)
 - Contract labour threshold raised:
 - 20 → 50 workers
 - Government approval for layoffs required only for establishments with:
 - 300+ workers (earlier 100)
- Rise of contractual employment
 - Direct factory employment declined 61% (2011) → 47% (2023).

Static Linkages

- Directive Principles of State Policy
 - Article 39 – Adequate livelihood
 - Article 41 – Right to work
 - Article 42 – Humane working conditions
 - Article 43 – Living wage
- Article 23 – Prohibition of forced labour
- Article 24 – Prohibition of child labour in hazardous industries
- Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) – main employment data source.
- Informal sector share
 - About 80-85% of India's workforce works in informal conditions.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Simplifies labour regulations by consolidating multiple laws.
- Improves ease of doing business and encourages investment.
- Introduces legal recognition for gig and platform workers.
- Promotes labour market flexibility.

Concerns

- Raising thresholds may exclude many workers from legal protections.
- Expansion of contractual and fixed-term employment may reduce job security.
- Inspector-cum-facilitator model may weaken labour law enforcement.
- Lack of clarity in gig worker welfare schemes and minimum wage determination.
- Risk of formalisation without improvement in working conditions.

Way Forward

- Expand universal social security coverage for informal and gig workers.
- Strengthen labour inspection and enforcement mechanisms.
- Provide clear rules for gig worker welfare schemes.
- Ensure balanced labour flexibility with worker protection.
- Promote skill development and labour-intensive sectors to create stable employment.

Justice for all

The directives on NCERT show the Court as keen to stave off any criticism

The Supreme Court of India's sense of hurt at references to judicial corruption in a National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbook is in danger of resulting in a serious case of miscarriage of justice. According to the Court, the NCERT's textbook development team did not have "reasonable, informed knowledge about the Indian judiciary". The Court went on to direct that persons such as those in the team should not be associated in "any manner with preparation of school curriculum or finalisation of textbooks for the next generation of this country". This sweeping statement has cast a shadow over the entire exercise of textbook writing. While insisting on independent domain experts such as a senior judge to approve the chapters on judiciary before publication, the Court could have initiated a similar process for other chapters as well, especially for those dealing with history where the misrepresentation of facts is sometimes tinged with bigotry.

In the past, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allied organisations had critiqued Indian textbooks saying that they were Macaulay-an and created "westernised" minds that did not hold India's past, its traditions, and the Hindu religion as sacred. When the BJP came to power, it sought to redraft the textbooks along these lines. Now, references to Hindu rituals and beliefs are found across textbooks and subjects. For instance, a discussion on solar energy refers to the ritual of "arghyam", a Vedic salutation to the sun by pouring water. Geography is strictly science, but a geography chapter in a class seven textbook talks about a divine feminine presence pervading the Indian landmass, thereby making it sacred. The Court must apply the same yardsticks it used for the judiciary chapters to history chapters in the textbooks too. Part 1 of the same social science textbook for class eight describes Muslim rulers as uniformly and singularly cruel, despotic and repressive whereas Hindu kingdoms are portrayed as benign and as resisting Muslim rule. Objectivity is given short shrift, leading to genuine fears that the narrative is to instigate bigotry even though the class eight textbook includes a disclaimer that today's generation is not to be blamed for the 'sins' of the past. Textbook writing requires not just subject matter expertise but also skill that would genuinely kindle knowledge and inquiry as well as train minds towards valuing fairness, equality, peace and harmony. The language is important, so is the intent. Any selective targeting of chapters will only reinforce the perception that the judiciary is merely protecting itself. That, ultimately, would undermine any conception of justice.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Supreme Court of India raised concerns over references to judicial corruption in a social science textbook prepared by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).
- The Court observed that the textbook development team lacked "reasonable and informed knowledge about the Indian judiciary."
- It directed that individuals responsible for the content should not be associated with future textbook preparation.
- The Court also suggested that chapters related to the judiciary be vetted by domain experts such as senior judges before publication.
- The issue has triggered debate on academic autonomy, judicial oversight, and objectivity in school textbooks.

Key Points

- NCERT is an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Education, responsible for developing the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and school textbooks.
- The Supreme Court objected to textbook references implying corruption in the judiciary without adequate evidence.

- The Court recommended expert scrutiny of chapters dealing with the judiciary before their inclusion in textbooks.
- Concerns have been raised regarding:
 - Selective scrutiny of textbook content.
 - Potential bias in portrayal of historical events.
 - Increasing cultural or religious references in non-related subjects in textbooks.
- The controversy highlights tensions between judicial accountability, academic freedom, and curriculum governance.

Static Linkages

- Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of speech and expression (includes academic expression).
- Article 21A – Right to free and compulsory education for children aged 6–14 years.
- 42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976) – Education shifted from State List to Concurrent List.
- Judiciary functions as guardian of the Constitution and protector of fundamental rights.
- School curricula are guided by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF).

Critical Analysis

Positive Aspects

- Ensures accuracy and credibility in educational content.
- Protects the institutional integrity of the judiciary.
- Encourages involvement of domain experts in curriculum development.

Concerns

- May lead to judicial overreach into academic autonomy.
- Risk of restricting critical discussion on institutional functioning.
- Selective scrutiny may affect perceived neutrality of educational content.
- Textbooks should maintain historical objectivity and balanced narratives.

Way Forward

- Establish independent expert review panels for textbook content across subjects.
- Ensure academic autonomy with accountability in curriculum development.
- Follow evidence-based and peer-reviewed processes for textbook preparation.
- Maintain balanced historical and institutional narratives to promote critical thinking.
- Strengthen transparent curriculum review mechanisms under the National Curriculum Framework.

Arbitrary and opaque EPFO has tweaked pension scheme rules without wide consultations

The manner in which the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)'s Central Board of Trustees (CBT) approved the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) 2026, on March 2, replacing the EPS 1995 scheme, has raised serious transparency concerns. This affects approximately 5.4 crore contributing members and 82 lakh pensioners. Although the EPS and the Employees' Provident Fund and Employees' Deposit-Linked Insurance Schemes were designed as a corollary to the Code on Social Security, 2020 – which was abruptly notified in November 2025 along with three other Codes – neither the government nor the Labour Ministry had, until now, given any hint of the new schemes. The stakeholders were not consulted by the authorities. More than any other scheme, the EPS 1995, has over the past decade, dominated headlines due to litigation in various courts, including the Supreme Court of India. Over the past 12 years, certain features of the scheme were altered, to the detriment of employees. For instance, coverage of the Pension Scheme was limited to those earning up to ₹15,000 a month, instead of offering universal coverage as originally intended. The pensionable salary calculation changed from the average pay in the last 12 months to 60 months, substantially reducing the amount of eligible pension. The unrestricted option for pension on a higher pension was limited to those who had exercised the option within a year of the modified scheme that came into force on September 1, 2014. With the Supreme Court's intervention in 2022, the higher pension option was extended to post-2014 retirees as a special case. Unfortunately, pre-2014 retirees were left in the lurch as the unrealistic conditions set by the PF body made most of them ineligible for higher pension.

In the new Pension Scheme approved by the CBT, the option provision has been removed as it is considered 'obsolete' for reflecting a narrow legal interpretation. Moreover, those hoping for an upward revision of the ₹15,000 PF contribution ceiling are disappointed, as no such indication has been given so far. Both the wage ceiling and the minimum pension of ₹1,000 were fixed over 11 years ago. The EPFO's overall approach seems to be aimed at reducing what authorities describe as the burden of pension commitment. With greater government funding and higher contributions from employers and willing employees, the EPFO can well meet pension challenges. A positive mindset along with empathy for pensioners and contributors is what is needed from the Union government and EPFO. A mere change of laws, regulations and procedures will not deliver the results desired by crores of members and lakhs of pensioners.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation approved Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) 2026 replacing the Employees' Pension Scheme 1995.
- The decision affects around 5.4 crore EPFO contributing members and about 82 lakh pensioners.
- The scheme is linked to implementation of the Code on Social Security, 2020, which was notified in November 2025.
- Concerns have been raised over lack of stakeholder consultation and absence of public discussion before approval.
- The EPS 1995 scheme had faced extensive litigation, including a 2022 ruling by the Supreme Court of India on higher pension eligibility.

Key Points

- EPS Coverage
 - Applicable to employees covered under EPFO.
 - Approximately 5.4 crore contributors and 82 lakh pensioners.
- Contribution Pattern
 - Employer contributes 12% of wages to EPF, of which 8.33% goes to EPS (subject to wage ceiling).
 - Central Government contributes 1.16% of wages.

- Wage Ceiling
 - Pensionable wage ceiling remains ₹15,000 per month (unchanged since 2014).
- Minimum Pension
 - ₹1,000 per month, fixed in 2014 and not revised since.
- Pension Calculation
 - Pensionable salary calculated on average of last 60 months of salary.
- Higher Pension Option
 - Restricted after 2014 amendment.
 - Supreme Court (2022) allowed eligible employees to opt for higher pension under certain conditions.
- Concerns in EPS 2026
 - Removal of higher pension option provision.
 - No revision of wage ceiling or minimum pension.
 - Perception that reforms focus on reducing pension liabilities.

Static Linkages

- The State aims to ensure social security for workers during old age and unemployment.
- Labour welfare policies include provident fund, pension and insurance schemes for organized sector workers.
- Social security is part of the Directive Principles of State Policy related to worker welfare.
- India's labour reforms aim to consolidate multiple labour laws into four labour codes.

Critical Analysis

Issues

- Lack of transparency and stakeholder consultation.
- Low minimum pension (₹1,000) inadequate for elderly welfare.
- Wage ceiling unchanged since 2014, reducing real pension value due to inflation.
- Limited access to higher pension benefits.
- Concerns about financial sustainability vs social security objectives.

Implications

- May weaken retirement security of organized sector workers.
- Could increase litigation and pension disputes.
- Raises questions on policy transparency in labour reforms.

Way Forward

- Revise wage ceiling and minimum pension periodically based on inflation.
- Ensure consultation with trade unions, employers and pensioners.
- Conduct actuarial review of pension fund sustainability.
- Strengthen social security coverage for workers.
- Increase government support for pension financing.

Atmanirbharta is managing external dependencies, big-power rivalries

THE WEAPONISATION of India's oil imports by the United States, linking the sourcing of oil to terms for bilateral trade, is a reminder of the constraints imposed by each external dependence on national security and foreign policy. Independent India began its development process with four critical external dependencies — food, foreign exchange, defence equipment and energy. The foreign exchange crisis of 1957-58 alerted policy makers to the external financial constraint. The war with China in 1962 signalled the shortage of defence equipment. The droughts of 1945-47 drew attention to the critical dependence on food imports. The Gulf War of 1990 contributed to a spike in oil prices that triggered a balance-of-payments crisis.

The governments of the day learnt important economic and foreign policy lessons from each crisis. The shortcoming in defence equipment available during the 1962 war forced Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru to reach out to the United States for assistance. The food crisis of the mid-Sixties showed how external dependence in a vital sector like food could also be used to shape foreign policy choices. President Lyndon Johnson tried to link food aid to a change in India's stance on the war in Vietnam. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi stood her ground. The oil crisis of 1990 and the subsequent foreign exchange crisis of 1991 forced India to approach the International Monetary Fund for support. Neither the United States nor other developed economies were willing to help India until the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi undertook major changes in both economic and foreign policy. The diplomatic recognition of



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Israel was one consequence. More recently, the weaponisation of frictions by the Great Powers (G7) economies, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the weaponisation of energy supplies by US President Donald Trump, draw attention to the constraints being imposed on the pursuit of an independent foreign policy and highlight the strategic importance of greater self-reliance. Little wonder then that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has rediscovered the relevance of Nehru's policy of self-reliance, that is atmanirbharta, even as Panditji is slammed day in and day out. It should be clear to the managers of national security that the US will persist with its present policy of weaponising all forms of trade, especially trade in defence, defence equipment and access to advanced and critical technologies. The optimism generated by last February's joint statement titled, "US-India COMBAT — Catalysing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce & Technology — for the 21st Century", should now be set aside given the events of the last 12 months. Prime Minister Modi and President Trump even signed on to another optimistic acronym, "US-India Transforming the Relationship Utilising Strategic Technology" — when they agreed that "energy security is fundamental to economic growth, social wellbeing and technical innovation in both countries". Trump signed on to a statement that promised to "ensure energy affordability, reliability and availability, and stable energy markets".

By renegeing on that promise Trump has undone a quarter-century of trust building between the US and India. The TRUST statement says both countries are "leading producers and consumers, in driving the global energy landscape", committing them to an Energy Security Partnership, including in oil, gas, and civil nuclear energy. India can no longer trust Trump's America on energy security after the events of the last fortnight. Joining hands with Israel, the US has engulfed all of West Asia in a war that has serious consequences not just for India's energy security but also the larger economic interest it has invested in the region. Given the geo-economic stake India has acquired in the Gulf, the Israel-US action amounts to a betrayal of trust. The Prime Minister ought to stand up and say as much in Parliament. Indian national security managers would be well advised not to get locked into any more agreements with the US during the remainder of the Trump administration given the direction of Trump's economic and geopolitical policies. The Modi government's policy of "atmanirbharta" requires it to stand up to the challenge of neo-imperialism posed by Trump's aggressive moves around the world. Self-reliance is earned, not granted. Even as India continues to manage these longstanding external dependencies in an increasingly uncertain and difficult global economic and geopolitical environment, new vulnerabilities have come to the fore. Over the past decade, elite emigration has emerged as a new source of external vulnerability. For a long time, India has viewed the US as a friend and ally, a source of external support, especially in developed countries and in West Asia, as a symbol of "soft power" and a

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- Diaspora and Strategic Risks
 - India has a large diaspora in West Asia and developed economies.
 - Anti-immigration policies and geopolitical conflicts can affect remittances and labour mobility.
- Policy Response
 - India has emphasised Atmanirbhara Bharat (self-reliance) in defence, technology and energy sectors.
 - Focus on diversification of energy sources and strengthening domestic production.

Static Linkages

- Non-Alignment Policy: Ensured strategic autonomy during the Cold War.
- 1991 Economic Reforms: Introduced liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation after the BOP crisis.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR): India maintains reserves at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur.
- Energy Mix: Increasing focus on renewable energy (solar, wind, green hydrogen) to reduce import dependence.

Critical Analysis

Advantages of Self-Reliance

- Strengthens strategic autonomy in foreign policy.
- Reduces vulnerability to sanctions and supply disruptions.
- Promotes domestic industrial capacity and technological development.

Challenges

- Globalisation creates deep economic interdependence.
- Achieving full self-reliance in energy and technology is difficult.
- High cost of developing domestic defence and technology ecosystems.
- Balancing relations among US, Russia and China remains complex.

Way Forward

- Diversify energy import sources beyond West Asia.
- Expand renewable energy capacity to reduce fossil fuel dependence.
- Strengthen Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Promote domestic defence and technology manufacturing.
- Maintain multi-alignment diplomacy to manage major power rivalries.
- Enhance supply chain resilience in critical sectors.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Recent geopolitical tensions in West Asia and policy shifts by major powers have highlighted the weaponisation of trade, finance and energy supplies.
- Global powers are increasingly using sanctions, technology restrictions and energy supply controls to influence other countries' foreign policies.
- India's historical experience shows that external dependencies have periodically created strategic vulnerabilities.

Key Points

- External Dependencies in Early India
 - Food imports during the 1960s droughts exposed food security vulnerability.
 - Dependence on foreign defence equipment became evident during the 1962 war with China.
 - Foreign exchange crisis (1957-58) highlighted financial dependence.
 - 1990-91 Balance of Payments crisis partly triggered by the Gulf War oil price spike.
- Energy Security Concerns
 - India imports around 85% of its crude oil requirements (Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas).
 - West Asia supplies a significant share of India's oil imports.
 - Conflicts in the region can disrupt supply chains and increase oil prices.
- Weaponisation of Economic Tools
 - Financial sanctions, technology restrictions and energy supply manipulation are increasingly used as geopolitical tools.
 - Major powers have used trade restrictions, financial systems and technology access to influence global politics.

Dignity of life should take into account the ethics of letting go



HARMALA GUPTA

DIGNITY WITH dignity is one of the most vexing challenges we face today. It is a consequence of technological advances in the medical field that keep us physically alive but extract a huge toll in terms of psychological, social, financial and spiritual suffering.

Not surprisingly, this has led to a demand in many countries for physician-assisted suicide. It also comes with the argument that the right to life must include the quality of that life and that, when faced with unbearable suffering brought on by medical treatments that rob one of dignity, one should have the right to say "No more".

Given this background, the recent Supreme Court judgment allowing a young man who had been in a vegetative state for 13 long years after a tragic accident to finally die with dignity is welcome. However, the elderly parents should not have had to petition the courts over a number of years.

Surely, it could have been dealt with in a speedier manner by the doctors themselves when they realised that there was no hope of recovery. The procedure to be followed when there is no hope of recovery, regardless of whether a signed advance medical directive (AMD) is available or not, was clarified by a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in 2019 in response to an application filed by the Indian Society of Critical Care Medicine.

The need to act expeditiously, while also laying down safeguards, was emphasised. These require constituting a primary medical board in the hospital where the patient is being treated, as well as a secondary medical board that would include experts from outside the hospital to provide oversight. Both are to give their decisions, ideally, within 48 hours. This practice was certainly not followed in this case.

Discontinuing a treatment when you know that it is not in the interest of your patient, but will instead prolong suf-

fering, upholds the Hippocratic Oath to which all doctors are sworn. This is ethical medical practice.

It requires caring doctors who are willing to spend time with the patient and relatives, explaining the pros and cons, listening to their concerns, and honouring the AMD (if available) or the wishes the patient may have expressed to their loved ones or to a surrogate when able to do so.

The medical community, too, needs to come to a consensus as to whether removing a feeding tube or a breathing tube that is doing the patient more harm than good falls within the realm of ethical medical practice, or should be considered "passive euthanasia", as the court termed it in the present case.

Palliative care staff working with patients with debilitating and life-limiting conditions in our country have been emphasising the need for palliative care teams to guide this process of care and provide a pathway once it is clear that there is no cure or hope for recovery.

They are willing to contribute to the setting up of end-of-life guidelines in healthcare institutions for these patients and their caregivers. Based on our 30 years of experience at CanSupport in looking after patients with serious health-related suffering, there is no doubt in our minds that palliative care — which ensures continuing quality of life, and death with dignity — must be universally available and made part of our public health-care system.

No one should have to bear the indignity of life-prolonging measures, strapped to a machine in the ICU, that only increase suffering.

To reiterate, ensuring quality of life is as much an intrinsic part of ethical medical practice as prolonging life. It is not about being humane or kind; it is the professional duty of the doctor who has sworn an oath to relieve suffering.

The writer is founder-president, CanSupport.

No one should have to bear the indignity of life-prolonging measures, strapped to a machine in the ICU, that only increases suffering

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- The Supreme Court of India recently permitted the withdrawal of life-support for a man who had been in a vegetative state for 13 years after an accident, allowing him to die with dignity.
- The patient's elderly parents had approached the Court seeking permission to withdraw treatment as there was no possibility of recovery.
- The case highlights concerns regarding implementation delays in passive euthanasia procedures despite existing Supreme Court guidelines.
- The judgment reiterates the right to die with dignity as part of Article 21 (Right to Life).

Key Points

- Passive euthanasia: Withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining treatment when recovery is impossible.
- Active euthanasia (illegal in India): Direct intervention to cause death (e.g., lethal injection).
- Advance Medical Directive (AMD) / Living Will:
 - Legal document specifying that a person does not want life-support in terminal conditions.
- Supreme Court Judgments:
 - Aruna Shanbaug Case (2011) – Passive euthanasia allowed under strict conditions with court approval.
 - Common Cause vs Union of India (2018) – Recognised passive euthanasia and living wills; linked it to Article 21.

- 2019 Clarification – Simplified procedures for implementing living wills.
- Procedure for passive euthanasia:
 - Formation of Primary Medical Board (treating hospital doctors).
 - Formation of Secondary Medical Board (independent experts).
 - Decision ideally within 48 hours.
- Palliative care:
 - Medical care focused on relieving suffering and improving quality of life for patients with serious illnesses.
 - Recommended under National Health Policy 2017.

Static Points

- Article 21 – Protection of life and personal liberty; interpreted to include right to live with dignity.
- Active euthanasia is illegal in India.
- Passive euthanasia is legal under Supreme Court guidelines.
- Living Will recognised by Supreme Court (2018).
- WHO recognises palliative care as essential to universal health coverage.

Mains Value Addition

Significance

- Upholds human dignity and autonomy in end-of-life decisions.
- Prevents unnecessary prolongation of suffering through futile medical interventions.
- Encourages ethical medical practice.

Issues

- Lack of awareness about living wills.
- Limited palliative care infrastructure in India.
- Doctors' fear of legal liability.
- Delay in forming medical boards.

Way Forward

- Promote awareness and registration of Advance Medical Directives.
- Develop clear hospital-level protocols for passive euthanasia decisions.
- Expand palliative care services in public healthcare institutions.
- Provide legal protection and clarity for doctors implementing end-of-life decisions.

Question CEC, but move to impeach is unwise

THE IMPEACHMENT motion likely to be moved in Parliament by parties of the Opposition against Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar is not a step towards resolution of a political problem, but its disquieting symptom. Clearly, even a united Opposition does not have the numbers to carry the motion through. At best, therefore, it can use it to register a symbolic protest against what it sees as the EC's biased functioning — the draft motion cites his "partisan and discriminatory conduct" and "mass disenfranchisement" through the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls. The motion against CEC Kumar is set to come on the heels of a similar Opposition move against the Speaker — the no-confidence motion against Om Biriya, seeking his removal for the alleged failure to ensure the House's impartial functioning, was rejected by a voice vote in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. In both cases, the Opposition is taking an extreme step to draw attention to the less-than-fair conduct of umpires. In both, there is merit in the Opposition's grievances. But it needs to ask itself whether by rushing to use an instrument of last resort to score only a symbolic point, it undermines itself, while risking a hardening of confrontation with a high-ranking constitutional authority.

To be sure, the EC has acted in ways that invite accusations of political bias on the watch of CEC Kumar. He has treated the Opposition with disrespect and the poll body's decisions have often handed the advantage to the ruling party. The conduct of the SIR in Bihar raised questions of pace and timing, setting off a scramble for hard-to-get documents and casting the burden of proof on the vulnerable voter in an exercise that morphed into a test of citizenship. But then, the Supreme Court stepped in, to nudge the EC towards greater transparency, to direct it to include Aadhaar as proof of identity, so that the SIR does not become an exercise of exclusion. Even amid the ongoing SIR ahead of elections in West Bengal, the SC intervention has tamped down the escalating confrontation between the Mamata Banerjee government and the EC — the Chief Minister called off her sit-in after the Court ordered the formation of tribunals to hear appeals against exclusion from voter lists.

Amid the polarisation, then, and in spite of an executive that weaponises its majority, there are countervailing forces, checks and balances. The Opposition needs to make its way by appealing to, and widening these spaces from within, strategically and imaginatively. No-confidence and impeachment motions are a cop-out, and an abdication of that responsibility.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Opposition is planning to move an impeachment motion against the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar in Parliament.
- The motion alleges partisan and discriminatory conduct by the Election Commission (EC).
- The allegations are mainly linked to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, which reportedly caused large-scale voter exclusion concerns.
- Since the Opposition does not have the required numbers in Parliament, the motion is largely symbolic.
- The issue comes amid wider criticism of the EC's functioning and concerns about institutional neutrality in elections.
- The Supreme Court intervened, asking the EC to increase transparency and allowing Aadhaar as a proof of identity during the electoral roll revision process.

Key Points

- The Election Commission is responsible for conducting free and fair elections in India.
- Allegations raised by the Opposition include:
 - Bias in decision-making.
 - Lack of transparency in electoral roll revision.
 - Risk of disenfranchisement of vulnerable voters due to documentation requirements.

- The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is a process undertaken by the EC to update electoral rolls by verifying voters and removing ineligible names.
- Judicial oversight acted as a check by directing improved transparency and establishing mechanisms to appeal exclusion from voter lists.

Static Linkages

- Article 324 provides for the establishment of the Election Commission.
- The Election Commission consists of:
 - Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)
 - Other Election Commissioners.
- Removal of CEC
 - Removed in the same manner and on the same grounds as a Supreme Court judge (special majority in Parliament).
- Removal of Election Commissioners
 - Can be removed by the President only on the recommendation of the CEC.
- The Election Commission performs functions such as:
 - Conduct of Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, State Assembly, Presidential and Vice-Presidential elections.
 - Preparation and revision of electoral rolls.
 - Monitoring Model Code of Conduct (MCC).

Critical Analysis

Issues

- Allegations of bias can reduce public trust in electoral institutions.
- Electoral roll revision processes may exclude vulnerable populations lacking documents.
- Political conflicts involving constitutional authorities can weaken institutional credibility.

Institutional Perspective

- Stringent removal procedures ensure independence of constitutional authorities.
- Judicial review acts as a safeguard when institutional disputes arise.

Way Forward

- Ensure greater transparency in electoral roll revision.
- Establish strong grievance redress mechanisms for excluded voters.
- Encourage institutional dialogue between EC and political parties.
- Implement electoral reforms to strengthen neutrality and accountability.
- Promote institutional checks and balances while protecting independence of constitutional bo