

DAILY NEWSP APER ANALYSIS

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Iran hits Gulf energy sites after attack on its gas field; Tehran's intel chief killed

Stanly Johnny

Iran on Wednesday night struck oil facilities in Persian Gulf countries, following the U.S. and Israeli strikes on gas facilities in Iran's southern Bushehr province. This came hours after Israeli air strikes killed Iran's Intelligence Minister Esmael Khatib, the third high-profile assassination in 24 hours.

"Moments ago, parts of the gas facilities located in the South Pars Special Economic Energy Zone in Asaluyeh were struck by projectiles fired by the American-Zionist enemy," Iranian state television reported. The South Pars/North Dome mega-field is the largest known gas reserve in the world. Iran had earlier warned that any attack on its energy infrastructure would trigger retaliatory strikes at energy facilities in the region.

Qatar's state-run energy company said that fires set by Iranian strikes on its main gas facility had caused "extensive damage". "QatarEnergy confirms that Ras Laffan Industrial City this evening has been the subject of missile attacks," the firm said in a statement. "All personnel have been accounted for and no casualties have been reported at this time."

Qatar said that attacks were a "direct threat to its national security". "Qatar considers this assault a dangerous escalation, a flagrant violation of its sovereignty, and a direct threat to its national security," the



Sea of mourners: People at the funeral of Iranian security chief Ali Larjani in Tehran on Wednesday. REUTERS

Gulf state's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

According to late night reports, a second round of loud explosions rang out over Riyadh, after authorities previously said they intercepted four missiles.

Iran's Khatam Al-Anbiya military command earlier said in a statement that it would "severely strike the source of the aggression and consider targeting the fuel, energy and gas infrastructure" of the countries from which the attacks were launched. Iran says the U.S. is using its bases in the Persian Gulf monarchies to launch its attacks.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps had issued "urgent evacuation" orders for people living near key energy production facilities in the Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE.

According to Iran's Oil Ministry, U.S.-Israeli air strikes targeted parts of the refinery installations in Asaluyeh that process natural gas from South Pars, located on the maritime border between Iran and Qatar. "We have repeatedly warned your leaders

against following this dangerous path and dragging their peoples into a major gamble with their fate," the IRGC said.

Slew of assassinations

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian confirmed that Khatib had been killed. "The cowardly assassination of my dear colleagues Esmael Khatib, Ali Larjani, and Aziz Nasirzadeh, alongside some of their family members and accompanying team, has left us in deep mourning," he wrote in a social media post.

In separate strikes on Monday night, Israel had killed Larjani, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, and Gholamreza Soleimani, commander of the Basij paramilitary forces.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has "authorised the IDF to [assassinate] any senior Iranian figure without the need for further approval," Mr. Katz said.

(With inputs from AFP)

BEIRUT BOMBED

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Static Linkages

- India imports ~85% of crude oil → vulnerable to West Asia instability.
- LNG requires cooling to -162°C for transport.
- Gulf region central to OPEC production and global energy markets.
- Energy security pillars: availability, affordability, accessibility.

Critical Analysis

- Concerns
 - Threat to global energy supply chains
 - Rising oil prices → inflationary pressure (India)
 - Risk of regional war escalation
 - Violation of sovereignty norms
- Strategic Dimension
 - Energy infrastructure as a strategic target in modern warfare
 - Increased militarisation of West Asia

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Iran carried out missile strikes on energy infrastructure in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE.
- This was in retaliation to U.S.-Israeli air strikes on Iran's South Pars gas facilities (Bushehr).
- Senior Iranian officials (including Intelligence Minister) were killed in targeted strikes.
- Qatar's Ras Laffan Industrial City (LNG hub) was damaged.
- Escalation raises concerns over regional stability and global energy supply.

Key Points

- South Pars/North Dome: World's largest gas field (shared by Iran & Qatar).
- Persian Gulf: Critical for global oil & LNG supply.
- Strait of Hormuz: Key chokepoint for energy trade (~20% global oil).
- Iran warned of targeting energy infrastructure in Gulf states hosting U.S. bases.
- Risk of oil price surge, supply disruptions, and global economic instability.

Way Forward

- Diplomatic de-escalation via UN and regional platforms
- Diversification of energy imports (India)
- Strengthening Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR)
- Accelerating renewable energy transition

22 India-bound ships on Hormuz evacuation list

Of these, 20 vessels have been assessed as critical to India's energy security, carrying over 5 lakh tonnes of LNG, LPG and 16.76 lakh tonnes of crude oil; many agencies join hands for evacuation

M. Kalyanaraman
CHENNAI

Twenty-two India-bound vessels in the Persian Gulf region have been identified for evacuation for safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz by the Indian government.

Of these, 20 vessels have been assessed as critical to India's energy security, carrying some 2.15 lakh metric tonnes of LNG, 3.21 lakh tonnes of LPG and 16.76 lakh tonnes of crude oil.

These vessels are both Indian-flagged and foreign-flagged but all are bound for India.



Secure delivery: Indian-flagged vessel *Jag Laadki* carrying approximately 81,000 MT of crude oil, berthed at Adani Port, Mundra on Wednesday.

Critical cargo

Among the 20 energy-critical vessels, 10 are Indian-flagged. The 20 vessels include three LNG carriers, 10 LPG carriers, and seven crude oil tankers. Marshall Island, Liberia, Greece, Malta and Portugal are some of the other flags these ships carry.

In addition, two Indian-flagged container vessels have also been identified for evacuation to ensure safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

Coordination is ongoing with the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways; Directorate of Naval Operations (DNO); Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG); and the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFCIOR) for the evacuation of the ves-

sels from the Persian Gulf region.

Two LPG carriers and one oil tanker – *Shivalik*, *Nanda Devi* and *Jag Laadki* – were evacuated earlier, escorted by the Indian Navy from the Gulf of Oman region.

The three ships have reached India. The two LPG ships were carrying some 97,000 tonnes of the fuel. Navy sources had told *The Hindu* that the escorting will continue in future as well.

Shivalik has been partially discharged at Mundra and is awaiting commencement of ship-to-ship operations by the charterer, IOC. *Nanda Devi* has doubled-banked with *BW Birch* for ship-to-ship transfer at Vadinar. Cargo operations are expected to start soon.

Crude carrier *Jag Laadki* that was escorted by the Indian Navy reached Mundra Port earlier on Friday.

It was carrying approximately 81,000 metric tonnes of Murban crude oil from the United Arab Emirates. The vessel narrowly escaped damage when the Fujairah terminal where it was loading was attacked.

Stranded seafarers

Some 23,000 Indian seafarers are stranded in the Persian Gulf, of whom 658 are on Indian-flagged vessels.

Some 472 seafarers have been evacuated by various shipping companies from the Gulf region so far, as per the government. In total, 22 Indian vessels are in the Persian Gulf region, west of the Strait of Hor-

muz; two in the Gulf of Oman, east of the strait; one in the Gulf of Aden; and two in the Red Sea.

Of these, the government-owned Shipping Corporation of India owns six, of which five are in Persian Gulf and one in the Gulf of Aden.

No Indian ship has been attacked so far in the conflict in West Asia. But three Indian seafarers have died, four have been injured, and one reported missing in foreign-flagged vessels.

Government sources said that seven West Asia-bound vessels were waiting at major ports and five in other ports in India.

(with inputs from Saptaparno Ghosh in New Delhi)

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- Additional Vessels:
 - 2 Indian-flagged container vessels also identified for evacuation
- International Shipping Flags Involved:
 - Marshall Islands, Liberia, Greece, Malta, Portugal
- Operational Coordination:
 - Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways
 - Directorate of Naval Operations (Indian Navy)
 - Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas
 - IFC-IOR (Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region)
- Naval Escort Examples:
 - LPG carriers: *Shivalik*, *Nanda Devi*
 - Crude tanker: *Jag Laadki* (carrying Murban crude from UAE)
- Seafarer Situation:
 - ~23,000 Indian seafarers stranded
 - 472 evacuated so far
 - Casualties: 3 dead, 4 injured, 1 missing (on foreign vessels)
- Strategic Distribution of Indian Ships:
 - 22 in Persian Gulf (west of Strait of Hormuz)
 - 2 in Gulf of Oman
 - 1 in Gulf of Aden
 - 2 in Red Sea

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea; one of the world's most critical oil chokepoints.
- Around 20% of global petroleum trade passes through this strait (EIA estimates).
- India imports ~85% of its crude oil requirements, with a large share from West Asia.
- Concept of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs)—vital maritime routes for trade and energy flows.
- India's maritime doctrine emphasizes freedom of navigation and security of SLOCs.
- UNCLOS provisions ensure transit passage through international straits.

Mains Pointers

Importance

- Energy security of India
- Strategic maritime chokepoint relevance
- Role of Indian Navy in safeguarding trade

Challenges

- Dependence on West Asia
- Rising geopolitical conflicts
- Risk to Indian seafarers
- Increased shipping and insurance costs

Way Forward (Crisp)

- Diversify energy imports
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves
- Strengthen naval presence in IOR
- Enhance maritime cooperation (IFC-IOR)
- Promote alternative routes (INSTC)
- Diplomatic balancing in West Asia

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Rising tensions in West Asia and attacks on energy infrastructure have heightened risks in the Persian Gulf-Strait of Hormuz region.
- The Government of India has identified 22 India-bound vessels for evacuation to ensure safe passage.
- Of these, 20 vessels are critical for India's energy security, carrying large volumes of LNG, LPG, and crude oil.
- The Indian Navy has begun escort operations, reflecting India's proactive maritime security approach.

Key Points

- Energy Cargo at Risk:
 - ~2.15 lakh metric tonnes of LNG
 - ~3.21 lakh tonnes of LPG
 - ~16.76 lakh tonnes of crude oil
- Composition of Vessels:
 - 3 LNG carriers
 - 10 LPG carriers
 - 7 crude oil tankers
 - Mix of Indian-flagged and foreign-flagged vessels

NCERT book ban, a chapter on judicial transparency

Max Boot, former Features Editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, authored the seminal study on the United States judiciary, 'Out of Order: Arrogance, Corruption, and Incompetence on the Bench' (1998). Robert H. Bork, former Solicitor General of the United States, wrote the foreword to it with a striking conclusion – "Our Courts are behaving badly and the public, to the degree it can be brought to understand that, will exert force for reform, a reform that must be structural as well as intellectual and moral."

He observed that the book's subtitle sums up a system in distress. The book underscores the critical role that the media and citizens must play while dealing with the judicial institution in a democracy.

In February this year, the Supreme Court of India, faulting what it felt as selective reference to corruption within the judiciary, directed "a complete blanket ban" on a Class eight social science textbook published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The three-judge Bench, presided over by the Chief Justice of India, further alluded to "an underlying agenda to undermine the institutional authority and demean the dignity of the judiciary".

The Court subsequently ordered that the persons responsible for preparing the passages should be 'dissociated' from future projects by governments and public universities. The Court thus instantly punished them, without due process or hearing. The prohibition by the Court is problematic as it sends critical signals about the shape of India's democracy today.

What appears to have annoyed the Bench were the passages in the book on judicial delay and corruption in judiciary. As per the news report cited by the Court, the textbook has data on the approximate number of pending cases in Indian courts. It refers to the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct, which prescribe values for judicial life. It also discusses the in-house procedures evolved by the Supreme Court and the constitutional mechanism for the removal of errant judges.

An undermining of freedom
By itself, a book ban is the most egregious form of censorship. Such a move directly impacts the right to freedom of speech under Article 19, a solemn promise in the Constitution. This right could be restricted only by a law made by the



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state on grounds expressly provided under Article 19(2), such as "the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation, or incitement to an offence". There is no law made by the state to justify the ban on the book in question. Judicial orders or judgments do not come under the realm of 'law' made by the state, as understood in the context of Article 19 (*Naresh Shridhar Mirajkar vs State of Maharashtra*, 1966).

For an act to amount to contempt of court, there must be material that scandalises the authority of the court or prejudices or interferes with judicial proceedings or the administration of justice, as defined under Section 2(c) of the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971. Whether mere references to corruption in the judiciary and case backlogs meet this high threshold for criminal contempt was a question that, unfortunately, did not form part of the Court's deliberations. What was also not examined was whether the statements were too general in nature to suggest any malicious intent to scandalise the Court.

Further, and importantly, going by the scheme of judicial review, courts must put to constitutional scrutiny the law passed by Parliament often violating fundamental rights. When the courts take on the task of book banning, citizens are left without remedy, as constitutional courts are the last resort to safeguard fundamental rights.

Global efforts

In advanced democracies, the credibility of the court is a matter of concern, primarily for the court itself. Transparency International has conducted a number of surveys that show that there is a prevailing notion about judicial corruption. Judiciaries across the world have made efforts to address this problem. In Kenya, the reforms led by Chief Justice Willy Mutunga, between 2011 and 2013, are an illustrative example. During this period, institutions such as judicial ombudspersons, court users' committees, and performance management committees were established.

By 2013, public trust in Kenya in the judiciary had risen to 61%, compared to 27% in 2009. The reforms continued even thereafter. This happened only by acknowledging the issues and trying to address them, rather than suppressing critical voices.

In India, the courts including the top court have acknowledged the menace of delay and corruption. Judges have repeatedly warned about the 'bad apples' within the system. The very existence of the in-house Procedure indicates the possibility that a minuscule number of judges may breach their oath.

In *K. Veeraswami vs Union Of India And Others* (1991), the Court categorically held that judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court fall within the definition of "public servant" for the purposes of prosecution under the Prevention of Corruption Act, while also cautioning against the potential for misuse of this provision by the executive. The Court also said: "We consider that the society's demand for honesty in a judge is exacting and absolute. The standards of judicial behaviour, both on and off the Bench, are normally extremely high. For a judge to deviate from such standards of honesty and impartiality is to betray the trust reposed on him. No excuse or no legal relativity can condone such betrayal. From the standpoint of justice, the size of the bribe or scope of corruption cannot be the scale for measuring a judge's dishonour. A single dishonest judge not only dishonours himself and disgraces his office but jeopardises the integrity of the entire judicial system."

The need for introspection

Therefore, the need to eradicate corruption and delay is also in the best interest of the judiciary. In the interim order directing the book ban, the Court also pointed out that the "book also chooses not to delve into any of the transformative initiatives and measures pioneered by this Court towards overhauling legal aid mechanisms and streamlining the ease of access to justice". Not addressing all counterarguments might render an opinion potentially incomplete. Yet, that is no reason for banning the view expressed. If the exercise of free speech is required to follow a particular form, the right itself becomes illusory. During judicial deliberations, nobody pointed out that the judiciary, like other organs of the state, must be open to dissent and reform.

The first step in fighting systemic problems such as corruption – whether in the executive or the judiciary – is acknowledging it. After all, it is imperative to curb all kinds of corruption and that civil society is educated about the institutional challenges. A court that continuously reforms itself is the bedrock of any democracy.

- Global Example:
 - Kenya judicial reforms improved trust significantly (Transparency reforms).

Static Linkages

- Fundamental Rights: Freedom of speech with reasonable restrictions.
- Basic Structure: Judicial review.
- Separation of powers and checks & balances.
- Rule of law and equality before law.
- Ethical standards: Integrity and accountability in public office.

Critical Analysis

Issues

- Violates freedom of speech (no statutory basis).
- Indicates judicial overreach.
- Lack of natural justice (no hearing).
- Creates chilling effect on academia and media.

Justification

- Protection of judicial credibility.
- Avoiding misleading narratives among students.

Way Forward

- Promote constructive criticism of institutions.
- Strengthen judicial accountability mechanisms.
- Ensure due process in punitive actions.
- Increase transparency (data, performance, disclosures).
- Encourage balanced academic content, not censorship.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Supreme Court (2026) imposed a blanket ban on a Class VIII NCERT textbook.
- Objection: Content on judicial delay, corruption, and accountability mechanisms.
- Court cited institutional dignity and alleged attempt to undermine judiciary.
- Directed removal of authors without detailed hearing → concerns over due process.

Key Points

- Article 19(1)(a): Guarantees freedom of speech and expression.
- Article 19(2): Restrictions only through law, not judicial orders.
- Naresh Mirajkar Case (1966): Judicial orders ≠ "law" under Article 19.
- Contempt of Courts Act, 1971:
 - Requires scandalising court or obstructing justice.
 - General criticism does not automatically amount to contempt.
- Judicial Accountability:
 - K. Veeraswami Case (1991): Judges are public servants under Prevention of Corruption Act (with safeguards).
 - In-house procedure exists for judicial misconduct.
- Judicial Issues:
 - Over 5 crore pending cases (NJDG).
 - Concerns of delay and perceived corruption.

The top court's ban on an NCERT textbook exposes gaps in judicial accountability and public trust

The opportunity in Cameroon to rebalance the WTO

Today, trade is no longer just about economics. It is increasingly used as a geopolitical tool. Tariffs are imposed as pressure tactics, and economic dependence is sometimes used strategically. In this context, the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s Ministerial Conference (MC14), to be held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, Africa (March 26-29, 2026), comes at an important moment. The real issue is not whether the WTO needs reform, but whether it can adapt fast enough to stay relevant in a world moving toward more transactional and power-based trade relations.

WTO in turmoil
The WTO is facing its biggest crisis since its founding in 1995. Its dispute settlement system is still effectively paralysed because the Appellate Body appointments have been stalled for years. This weakens trust in the system, since rules matter only when they can be enforced. At the same time, WTO negotiations have struggled to keep pace with major shifts in global trade. Digital commerce is growing rapidly and now forms a large part of cross-border economic activity. Yet, WTO rules have not evolved at the same pace.

Decision-making has also become slow and difficult. With 166 members at very different levels of development, consensus is hard to reach and cumbersome. As a result, many negotiations produce limited outcomes and long-pending issues remain unresolved.

Meanwhile, geopolitical tensions and the growing use of tariffs as political tools have distorted markets. However, these problems should not be mistaken for irrelevance. Most global trade still operates under WTO rules. If enforceable multilateral rules weaken, global trade would become unpredictable and unstable. Smaller and poorer countries would suffer the most, because they rely on common rules to protect themselves from pressure by stronger economies.

The WTO's challenges are also part of a wider shift in the global order. The Munich Security



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The World Trade Organization's Ministerial Conference must ensure that trade is governed by rules rather than coercion

Report 2026 describes this as a move toward "wrecking-ball politics", where countries prefer disruption and short-term deals instead of gradual institutional reform. In trade, this is visible in the rise of unilateral tariffs, economic coercion and bilateral deals that bypass multilateral commitments. If this continues, rule-based trade could be replaced by ad hoc arrangements shaped mainly by power rather than shared principles.

Global production has changed

Against this backdrop, the MCH4 offers a chance not just to fix technical problems but to also restore balance between predictability and fairness. The original balance of rights and obligations in the WTO no longer reflects today's reality. Emerging economies now export advanced and technology-intensive products, climate-related trade measures are expanding, and digital networks are reshaping how global production works.

Rules designed for a late 20th century trading system cannot fully govern a 21st century trade system. Reform must start with restoring credibility to enforcement. Without a functioning dispute settlement system, commitments lose their value. Members need to rebuild a binding, trusted mechanism rather than relying mainly on temporary alternatives that lack universal acceptance. A robust dispute-resolution system helps remove politics from conflicts and keeps confidence in multilateral rules.

At the same time, predictability must go hand in hand with fairness. Long-standing disputes over agricultural subsidies, market distortions and unequal openness need transparent solutions. Many developing countries argue that while WTO rules ensure the rule of law, they do not always deliver the rule of justice. In other words, rules may be legally correct but still produce outcomes that feel unequal or developmentally unfair.

Reform should, therefore, improve transparency on subsidies, create credible

responses to distortive practices, and revisit special and differential treatment so that it remains meaningful in today's economic conditions.

Institutional adaptability is also important. The WTO's structures were designed for a smaller and less complex membership, which contributes to today's deadlock. Some countries are moving ahead in smaller groups on issues such as e-commerce, investment facilitation, and services. These efforts can help progress, but they must remain transparent, inclusive and connected to the wider WTO framework. Flexibility should help the system move forward, not divide it. If such initiatives remain open to all members and eventually become part of WTO rules, they can support reform instead of fragmentation.

Ultimately, WTO reform is not only technical but also normative. The Munich Security Report warns that a world shaped mainly by transactional deals would favour the powerful and leave weaker countries vulnerable.

The choice is clear

The WTO's value lies in preventing exactly this outcome by ensuring that trade is governed by rules rather than coercion. In an era of strategic competition, rules do not weaken sovereignty; they protect countries from economic domination.

The choice before the MCH4 is crystal clear. Members can undertake serious reform, preserving the WTO's stabilising core while updating its rules, procedures and developmental balance, or allow the system to drift further into fragmentation. Achieving reform will require political will and shared responsibility.

Rebalancing the WTO is ultimately about securing a workable framework for cooperation in a world where economic interdependence is still unavoidable. If the MC14 seizes this opportunity, it can show that meaningful reform remains the most credible path to sustaining global trade governance.

- Fragmentation Risk:
 - Rise of plurilateral agreements (e.g., e-commerce, investment facilitation).
- Significance of WTO:
 - Governs ~98% of global trade.
 - Ensures predictability, transparency, and rule-based trade.

Static Linkages

- Principle of Most Favoured Nation (MFN) and National Treatment.
- Concept of Comparative Advantage (David Ricardo).
- Balance of Payments (BoP) and trade deficits.
- Role of multilateral institutions in global governance.
- Public goods vs collective action problem in international relations.
- Subsidies and market distortions in agriculture.
- Evolution from GATT (1947) to WTO (1995).

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Ensures rule-based global trade system.
- Protects developing countries from coercion.
- Provides dispute resolution mechanism.

Challenges

- Paralysis of dispute settlement system.
- Consensus rule → inefficiency.
- Developed vs developing country divide.
- Rise of power-based trade relations.
- WTO rules outdated (digital trade, climate).

Way Forward

- Restore Appellate Body.
- Reform decision-making (flexible consensus).
- Update rules for digital & climate trade.
- Rationalise Special & Differential Treatment.
- Ensure transparency in subsidies.
- Strengthen multilateralism with political will.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) of the World Trade Organization is scheduled in Yaoundé, Cameroon (March 26–29, 2026).
- Occurs amid rising geopoliticalisation of trade—tariffs, sanctions, and economic coercion increasingly used as strategic tools.
- WTO faces a systemic crisis:
 - Dispute settlement paralysis due to stalled Appellate Body appointments.
 - Inability to address emerging domains like digital trade and climate-linked measures.
- The Munich Security Report 2026 highlights a shift toward “wrecking-ball politics”—erosion of multilateralism in favour of power-based arrangements.

Key Points

- Dispute Settlement Crisis:
 - Appellate Body non-functional since 2019 → weak enforcement of rules.
- Decision-making challenges:
 - WTO operates on consensus principle among 166 members → slow and gridlocked negotiations.
- Rise of Protectionism:
 - Increase in unilateral tariffs, sanctions, and trade weaponisation.
- Changing Nature of Trade:
 - Expansion of digital economy, global value chains, and services trade.
- Development Concerns:
 - Persistent issues:
 - Agricultural subsidies (developed vs developing countries).
 - Market access inequalities.

No end to suffering

India must enlist more support against Pakistan's bombing of Afghanistan

As the U.S.-Israel war against Iran rages, India's western frontiers have flared up, intensified by recent clashes between Pakistan and Afghanistan forces on the Durand Line. On Tuesday, Pakistani airstrikes tragically killed at least 400 Afghans at a drug treatment and rehabilitation centre. Pakistan, which has accused the Taliban administration of harbouring the Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and supporting its terror attacks on Pakistan, denied Afghanistan's accusations, claiming that its strikes had only targeted "military installations". Despite the denial, it is clear from visuals that the Omid Rehabilitation Facility in Kabul was destroyed. In an extremely strong statement, India condemned what it called Pakistan's "cowardly" targeting of a hospital, rejecting its denial as a cover-up for a "massacre", and called for an international inquiry. The Pakistan-Afghanistan conflict, which has been simmering for over a year, escalated in February when the Pakistan Air Force struck Taliban bases in Kabul, Kandahar, and Paktia in what it called Operation Ghazab Lil Haq (Righteous Fury). Tensions have also risen after TTP attacks killed 11 soldiers and a child in Bajaur and 32 people in an Islamabad mosque following a suicide bombing. Pakistan has also been angered by closer India-Afghanistan ties and New Delhi's hosting of Taliban ministers, accusing the Taliban of turning Afghanistan into an "Indian colony" – a turnaround from its support in 2021, for the Taliban's rise to power in Kabul. Apart from its continued tensions and hatred of India, and now Afghanistan, Pakistan possibly benefits from the global focus on the U.S.-Israel war with Iran. The U.S.'s actions here and its statement expressing support for Pakistan's "right to defend itself against Taliban attacks", has also imbued Pakistan's generals with a sense of impunity to strike targets in Afghanistan at will.

New Delhi could be permitted some sense of 'payback' as Islamabad's fight against cross-border terrorism from Afghanistan mirrors India's problems with Pakistan. The constraints on Pakistan's military in a two-front situation with India and Afghanistan, compounded by a transnational war on the third front, may also be the source of some relief for India. With no dialogue with Pakistan, and the limited dialogue with a Taliban regime it deals with but does not formally recognise, India's diplomatic role in the conflict is limited. However, it must enlist other SCO members that have been concerned over the outbreak of an "open war" between Pakistan and Afghanistan, to intervene. The region is already suffering from trade, energy and travel restrictions as a result of the West Asia war, to risk more volatility and loss of lives, particularly in Afghanistan, where the vulnerable, especially women, have suffered the most.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Pakistan conducted airstrikes in Afghanistan (Kabul, Kandahar, Paktia) targeting alleged TTP bases.
- Reports indicate destruction of a civilian rehabilitation facility in Kabul with high casualties (~400 deaths).
- Afghanistan accused Pakistan of targeting civilians; Pakistan denied and termed strikes as counter-terror operations.
- India condemned the strikes and called for an international inquiry.
- Escalation linked to:
 - Rising TTP attacks in Pakistan (Bajaur, Islamabad).
 - Ongoing Pakistan-Taliban tensions.
 - Wider geopolitical distraction due to West Asia conflict (U.S.-Israel-Iran).

Key Points

- Durand Line (1893): विवादित सीमा; Afghanistan does not recognize it.
- TTP (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan): Militant group targeting Pakistan; alleged safe havens in Afghanistan.
- Operation Ghazab Lil Haq: Pakistan's military operation against Taliban-linked targets.

- India's Position:
 - Strong condemnation of civilian targeting.
 - Engagement with Taliban (no formal recognition).
- U.S. Role: Supported Pakistan's "right to self-defence".
- Regional Impact:
 - Threat to energy routes and connectivity.
 - Risk of multi-front instability in South Asia.

Static Linkages

- UN Charter Article 2(4): Prohibits use of force against sovereignty.
- UN Charter Article 51: Right to self-defence.
- Concept of cross-border terrorism.
- Strategic Autonomy in India's foreign policy.
- Role of SCO in regional security cooperation.
- Colonial legacy borders (e.g., Durand Line disputes).

Critical Analysis

Advantages for India

- Pakistan's two-front pressure may reduce focus on India.
- Strengthens India's stance on state-sponsored terrorism.

Concerns

- Regional instability may spill over into India.
- Civilian casualties raise humanitarian issues.
- Taliban's uncertain role complicates diplomacy.

Challenges

- No formal ties with Taliban.
- Limited diplomatic leverage.
- Managing relations with major powers.

Way Forward

- Use SCO platform for regional de-escalation.
- Continue calibrated engagement with Afghanistan.
- Strengthen counter-terror diplomacy globally.
- Focus on humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.
- Maintain strategic balance in West Asia and South Asia.

Fire and more fire

India must treat hospital fire safety as an issue of criminal accountability

Cuttack is not an anomaly. It is the latest entry in a ledger of preventable deaths in Indian hospital ICUs. In 2016, 22 people died in a fire at a private hospital ICU in Bhubaneswar, which did not have the mandatory fire safety clearance. Following this tragedy, fire safety audits were made compulsory for such facilities. Last year, the Odisha government allocated about ₹320 crore for fire safety improvement across hospitals in the State. But this did not prevent the fire at the government SCB Medical College and Hospital, Cuttack, apparently caused by a short circuit in the ICU of the trauma care unit. Some reports suggest the fire may have started in a ventilator, which was later found heavily charred. The accident, which occurred in the early hours of Monday, claimed 12 of the 23 ICU patients. Although the hospital had a firefighting unit, its personnel arrived after more than 30 minutes, reportedly because staff did not alert them early. Additionally, the fire hydrants could not be operated by staff. Nevertheless, water is not the right medium to fight electric fires, which are best extinguished using carbon dioxide, a method that requires trained personnel. Last October, six patients were killed in an ICU fire in Rajasthan. In 2024, newborns died in an ICU fire in Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh. Two similar accidents were reported in Maharashtra in 2021. An audit in Jhansi revealed hazards including exposed wiring, inadequate earthing and electrical circuits not matching power load requirements – the last being a leading cause of electrical fires in India.

ICUs have intrinsic safety risks, as their oxygen-rich environment can turn even a spark into an inferno. ICUs are also packed with electrical equipment, and the personnel are not always well trained in their safe handling. State-of-the-art medical equipment comes with advanced electronics and variable frequency drives that generate what are called “harmonic currents”. These currents flow within circuits and typically have no safety devices such as circuit breakers. Harmonics create silent, persistent overheating and insulation degradation and are a severe fire hazard. Today’s electrical practice lays down that every time a new ventilator is wheeled into an ICU, the wiring, protection and load capacity must be re-evaluated. Older facilities need an electrical upgrade before cutting edge equipment can be installed. As patients in ICUs are often sedated, intubated, and connected to machines, staff must be trained to ensure their safe evacuation. Until India treats hospital fire safety as a matter of criminal accountability rather than bureaucratic paperwork, the fires will keep burning and the bodies will keep mounting.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Fire in ICU of SCB Medical College & Hospital, Cuttack (Odisha) → 12 deaths.
- Likely cause: electrical short circuit (possible ventilator malfunction).
- Repeated incidents:
 - Bhubaneswar (2016) – 22 deaths
 - Rajasthan (2025) – 6 deaths
 - Jhansi (2024) – neonatal deaths
 - Maharashtra (2021) – multiple cases
- Despite ₹320 crore allocation (Odisha) and mandatory audits, accidents continue.

Key Points

- ICUs are high-risk zones:
 - Oxygen-rich environment → rapid fire spread
 - High electrical load (ventilators, monitors)
- Primary causes
 - Electrical faults, overload, poor wiring
 - Harmonic currents → overheating
- Operational failures
 - Delay in firefighting response
 - Staff untrained in equipment use and evacuation
 - Improper extinguishing methods (water vs CO₂)

- Audit findings (Jhansi)
 - Exposed wiring, poor earthing, load mismatch

Static Linkages

- Article 21 → Right to life includes right to health and safety
- National Building Code (NBC) → fire safety norms for hospitals
- Disaster Management Act, 2005 → preparedness and mitigation
- NDMA Hospital Safety Guidelines → structural & non-structural safety
- CEA regulations → electrical safety standards

Critical Analysis

- Issues
 - Implementation gap despite regulations
 - Outdated infrastructure with modern equipment
 - Lack of training and preparedness
 - Weak enforcement and inspection system
- Ethical concern
 - Preventable deaths → administrative negligence
 - Lack of accountability

Way Forward

- Strict enforcement of fire safety audits
- Periodic electrical load assessment & upgrades
- Mandatory staff training & mock drills
- Install automatic fire suppression systems (CO₂-based)
- Fix criminal accountability for negligence
- Integrate fire safety with hospital accreditation (NABH norms)

Silence on West Asia war is not moral surrender, but responsible statecraft



THAROOR THINK
BY SHASHI THAROOR

IN THE last couple of weeks, many Indian liberals have turned their ire inward, accusing those of us who have not condemned the government's silence on the US-Israeli war against Iran of moral cowardice. In the American phrase, it has become a "circus firing squad" — shooting on ourselves. They want us all to demand that India should have taken the moral high ground, denouncing the war as a flagrant violation of international law.

Let me state clearly: I concur that the war cannot be justified under international law. It violates the very principles India has historically stood for — respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, and peaceful resolution of disputes. Nor, as I have explained earlier, is there a case for pre-emptive self-defence either. And yes, we should have promptly issued condolences on the death of the Supreme Leader of Iran, as we had done when its president was killed in a helicopter crash. I am free to say so, and so are my liberal friends in the Opposition or the media. But I will not condemn the government for choosing silence over confrontation.

India's diplomacy has always been about balancing principle with pragmatism. Jawaharlal Nehru's policy of non-alignment was not a refusal to take moral positions, but a recognition that India's sovereignty and survival depended on avoid-

ing entanglement in Cold War hostilities. Today, in an increasingly multipolar world, India practices "multi-alignment" — engaging with diverse powers, sometimes in tension with one another, while keeping our national interest paramount.

The objective has remained constant: Protect India's sovereignty while speaking for global justice. No one holds a monopoly over patriotism, nor over the interpretation of the values taught by Gandhi or Nehru. The true tribute to their legacy lies in applying their values wisely to the realities of our time, not in self-gratifying denunciations that condemn the government's interests.

Critics forget that India has often chosen silence when principles collided with national interest. We were reluctant to condemn the Soviet Union's flagrant violations of international law in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Afghanistan (1979). Why? Because we rightly judged that we had too much at stake in our relationship with Moscow to antagonise it with a moralistic stand. The Soviet Union was our principal arms supplier, a crucial diplomatic partner, and a counterweight to Western hostility.

That silence did not mean we endorsed Soviet aggression. It meant we understood the costs of confrontation and chose prudence over posturing. Today, the same logic applies to our stand on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Israeli-American assault on Iran.

India has far too much at stake, not only in the US, but in the Gulf Arab states currently facing Iranian missile and drone attacks. Nearly \$200 billion in annual trade flows through this region. Our energy security depends on Gulf oil and gas.

And the well-being of some 9 million Indian workers and residents in the Gulf is directly tied to regional stability.

To indulge in sanctimonious moralising by condemning the US-Israeli war on Iran would risk destabilising these relationships. It would jeopardise remittances that sustain millions of Indian households, energy supplies that fuel our economy, and trade ties that underpin our growth. Silence, in this context, is not cowardice. It is a sober recognition of the interconnectedness of our national interests with the realities of the region.

We must also acknowledge the nature of the government in Washington. Today the United States does not prioritise international law in the way we might wish. President Donald Trump is often willing to lash out at those who obstruct his objectives. While the war violates tenets we stand for, jeopardising the many other strategic interests we have with the US would be unwise.

Our defence cooperation, technology partnerships, and shared concerns about China's rise all depend on a stable relationship with Washington. To antagonise the US with a moralistic denunciation of its war would risk undermining these vital interests. Loud lecturing combines poorly with low leverage. Foreign policy is, above all, about the protection of sovereignty, the pursuit of prosperity, and the preservation of peace. Our interests are not served by indulging in the gratification of grandstanding — unless we are confident that we can comfortably withstand the consequences. And today, we cannot.

To acknowledge reality is not to know to anyone. India has often spoken for global justice in multilateral forums. But we have also known when to hold our tongue. That balance is the essence of responsible statecraft.

Silence, in the absence of leverage, can be strategy. It allows us to preserve our interests while keeping open the possibility of quiet diplomacy. It avoids unnecessary confrontation while preserving the channels of communication with both sides that might permit constructive action in favour of peace.

Indian liberals who demand condemnation of the war mistake moral absolutism for moral courage. They forget that foreign policy is not an academic seminar. It is the arena where principles meet power, and where choices have consequences for millions of lives. To insist on denunciation without regard for consequences is to indulge in the luxury of rhetoric at the expense of responsibility.

Yes, Gandhi taught the power of moral witness. Yes, Nehru spoke of international law as the foundation of peace. But both also understood the imperatives of national interest. Their legacy is not one of rigid dogma, but of wise adaptation.

The war on Iran is unjustifiable under international law. India's silence is not an endorsement of that war. It is a recognition that our national interest requires prudence, not posturing. If I were advising any Indian government, therefore, I too would counsel restraint. Restraint is strength: The strength to balance principle with pragmatism, to honour our values while safeguarding our interests, and to navigate a dangerous world with wisdom rather than bravado.

For a government to recognise geopolitical realities and weigh consequences for India's economy and strategic position before taking a public stand is not "moral surrender". It is responsible statecraft.

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

Static Linkages

- Principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-intervention.
- Non-alignment policy and its evolution into multi-alignment.
- Panchsheel principles in international relations.
- Concept of national interest vs moral idealism.
- Role of diaspora and remittances in economic stability.
- Energy security as a core component of foreign policy.
- UN Charter provisions on use of force (Article 2(4), Article 51).

Critical Analysis

Arguments Supporting India's Silence

- Ensures protection of national interest (energy, trade, diaspora).
- Reflects realist approach in international relations.
- Avoids antagonizing key partners like the US and Gulf nations.
- Maintains strategic autonomy.
- Allows scope for backchannel diplomacy.

Arguments Against India's Silence

- Undermines India's image as a moral leader (Vishwaguru).
- Weakens commitment to international law and UN principles.
- May reduce India's credibility in multilateral forums.
- Perceived inconsistency in foreign policy positions.
- Risks alienating sections of domestic and global opinion.

Stakeholder Perspectives

- Government: Prioritizes security, economy, and geopolitical balance.
- Strategic community: Supports pragmatic realism.
- Civil society & liberals: Advocate moral clarity and rule-based order.
- Diaspora & businesses: Prefer stability and non-confrontation.

Way Forward

- Maintain balanced diplomacy: combine principle with pragmatism.
- Use multilateral forums (UN, G20) to subtly advocate peace.
- Strengthen energy diversification to reduce vulnerability.
- Enhance strategic autonomy through defence and economic resilience.
- Promote rules-based international order without direct confrontation.
- Expand quiet diplomacy channels for conflict mediation roles.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Recent escalation involving US-Israel military action against Iran has raised concerns about violations of international law.
- Debate in India over the government's non-condemnation (strategic silence) of the conflict.
- Critics argue India should uphold its traditional values of sovereignty and non-aggression.
- The government has instead adopted a pragmatic, interest-based diplomatic stance.
- The issue reflects India's evolving foreign policy approach in a multipolar world.

Key Points

- The war is widely viewed as violating international law, with weak justification under pre-emptive self-defence.
- India's foreign policy is guided by multi-alignment, not rigid ideological positioning.
- India has historically maintained strategic silence in similar cases:
 - Soviet interventions in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), Afghanistan (1979).
- Critical stakes for India in West Asia:
 - ~\$200 billion trade with the Gulf region.
 - Major dependence on oil and gas imports.
 - ~9 million Indian diaspora in Gulf countries.
- Strong strategic ties with the United States:
 - Defence cooperation, technology partnerships, Indo-Pacific strategy.
- Silence seen as a tool to:
 - Avoid diplomatic confrontation.
 - Preserve economic and strategic interests.
 - Enable quiet diplomacy.

Diluting the power of lies in a post-truth age



GEORGE JOHN

TRUTH AND falsehood are not just opposing statements; they are rival ways of living together. Lies — especially when amplified by power or prestige — can circle the world before patient fact has laced its boots. We live in a “post-truth” age, where feelings often seem to weigh more than evidence and where every claim can be dismissed as “just your narrative”. Yet, ordinary life still depends on some shared sense that words ought to answer to reality. When that weakens, everything else begins to wobble.

What, then, do we mean by “truth”? Philosophers speak of correspondence (our words matching the world), coherence (our beliefs hanging together), and pragmatism (truth as what “works” in experience). In practice, we borrow from all three. A doctor, a judge, or a journalist needs statements that fit the facts, make sense within a wider picture, and continue to survive serious questioning. Truth-seeking is less a static possession than a disciplined habit: Gather evidence, listen to objections, revise when necessary, and still be willing to say, “On present evidence, this is what we should believe.” Plural perspectives do not mean anything goes. Different angles on reality can be partial without being arbitrary. Humility here is a virtue: The willingness to admit limits and learn from those who see what we have missed.

If truth matters so much, why do falsehoods flourish? Part of the answer is motivational: Lies can be comforting, convenient, or profitable. Part of it is structural: Rumours and half-truths are easy to share, while verification is slow and unglamorous. And part of it is what the philosopher Harry Frankfurt called “bull***”: Unlike the ordinary liar who still pays tribute to truth by trying to conceal it, the bull***er saws off the very branch on which public trust sits. Power deepens the damage. From totalitarian propaganda to today’s flood of contradictory messages, those who control megaphones can blur the line between fact and fiction. When citizens no longer know whom to trust, many retreat into cynicism or cling to their tribe’s preferred story. Most victims of misinformation are not wicked; they are human. We all prefer information that fits what we already believe. We are overwhelmed by headlines, clips, and forwards. In this environment, “cognitive ease” — what feels familiar — often masquerades as truth.

So, what can we do? We can practise a few modest disciplines. First, triangulation: Don’t rely on a single source; look for independent confirmation. Second, provenance: Ask who is saying this, how they know it, and what they stand to gain. Third, conversational ethics: Argue to understand, not just to win; try to restate an opponent’s view fairly before criticising it. Fourth, character: Cultivate the habit of admitting, “I was wrong.” We cannot purge public life of lies, but we can dilute their power. A truthful society is not one in which everyone agrees, but one in which disagreement is conducted with shared respect for reality. That requires courage, patience, and humility.

IN GOOD
faith

Truth-seeking is less a static possession than a disciplined habit: Gather evidence, listen to objections, revise when necessary, and still be willing to say, “On present evidence, this is what we should believe”

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Growing global concern over misinformation, disinformation, and erosion of trust in institutions, especially in the digital age.
- Rise of “post-truth politics”, where public discourse is shaped more by emotions than facts.
- Increasing role of social media platforms, AI-generated content, and algorithm-driven amplification of narratives.
- Concerns flagged by institutions like NITI Aayog, Economic Survey, and international bodies (UNESCO, WEF) on information disorder.
- Relevance for India in context of elections, governance, public policy debates, and social harmony.

Key Points

- Truth frameworks:
 - Correspondence → alignment with facts/reality
 - Coherence → internal consistency of beliefs
 - Pragmatism → what works in practice
- Post-truth features:
 - Emotional appeal outweighs evidence
 - Rise of “alternative facts” and narrative relativism
- Reasons for spread of falsehoods:
 - Psychological bias → confirmation bias, cognitive ease

- Structural issues → rapid spread vs slow verification
- Motivational factors → profit, propaganda, political gain
- Concept of “Bullshit” (Harry Frankfurt):
 - Indifference to truth itself, unlike lying
- Impact:
 - Erosion of public trust
 - Weakening of democratic discourse
 - Polarisation and social fragmentation
- Solutions suggested:
 - Triangulation of sources
 - Checking provenance
 - Ethical debate and humility
 - Institutional credibility strengthening

Static Linkages

- Fundamental Duties → promote harmony, scientific temper (Article 51A)
- Freedom of Speech with reasonable restrictions (Article 19(2))
- Role of media as the “Fourth Estate”
- Ethics → objectivity, integrity, accountability
- Cognitive biases (NCERT Psychology basics)
- Role of civil services in maintaining neutrality and truthfulness

Critical Analysis

Positives of Truth-Seeking Framework

- Strengthens democratic accountability
- Promotes evidence-based policymaking
- Builds institutional trust
- Encourages scientific temper

Concerns / Challenges

- Rapid spread of misinformation vs slow fact-checking
- Algorithmic bias and echo chambers
- State vs free speech dilemma (regulation vs censorship)
- Declining credibility of traditional institutions
- Weaponisation of information (fake news, deepfakes)

Stakeholder Perspectives

- Government → need to regulate without overreach
- Media → responsibility vs TRP pressure
- Citizens → digital literacy gap
- Tech platforms → accountability vs profit model

Way Forward

- Strengthen fact-checking institutions (PIB Fact Check, independent bodies)
- Promote media literacy and critical thinking in education
- Ensure algorithm transparency and platform accountability
- Encourage ethical journalism standards
- Develop legal safeguards against misinformation without curbing dissent
- Foster scientific temper and constitutional values
- Civil servants to uphold objectivity, neutrality, and evidence-based decisions

Killing Iran's leaders is fraught and escalatory

As the war launched by the US and Israel on Iran enters its third week, the killing of Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, by Israel and the strikes on South Pars, part of the world's largest gas field, mark an escalation both rapid and perilous. Larijani's killing is another damaging blow to the regime after the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on the war's first day. Together with the killing of Basij commander Gholamreza Soleimani, this decapitation strategy is one Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu believes could create the conditions for a popular uprising in Iran. On the evidence so far, the targeting of high-ranking leaders, one by one, has done little to rally the Iran street — instead, it could have shrunk the space for any diplomatic spadework that will, inevitably, have to follow the conflict once the pieces need to be picked up.

History is replete with attempts at regime change that led to instability and chaos, leaving power vacuums for armed groups to exploit. In the case of Iran, however, that may not necessarily be a downside for Israel. Unlike the US, which has extensive economic and defence ties with Gulf states, Israel's leadership may well view a prolonged war and an unstable Iran as favourable outcomes, not least in an election year for Netanyahu. The resignation letter of Joe Kent, director of the National Counterterrorism Centre, says the US "started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby". This has come amid continuing lack of clarity in President Donald Trump's war aims and claims. Despite Trump's efforts to draw NATO into the conflict by pressing allies to deploy warships to open up the Strait of Hormuz, countries across Europe, as well as Japan, Australia, and Canada, have held firm in their refusal, leaving the US largely isolated, alongside Israel. US allies are justified in being cautious against joining a war they never supported.

India's energy security depends heavily on the Gulf and the uninterrupted flow of traffic through the Strait of Hormuz. Nearly 1 crore Indian citizens live and work in the region, making both their welfare and the flow of remittances vital national interests. India has done well to keep all lines of communication open. Delhi's understated diplomacy is beginning to show results: Last weekend, two Indian-flagged LPG carriers crossed the Strait. Undoubtedly, India and Israel share a growing, close strategic partnership that has strengthened in recent years. But Delhi must remain alert to the rapid escalation as it risks moving towards a point where Indian and Israeli interests begin to diverge.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The ongoing war involving the U.S. and Israel against Iran has escalated with strikes on South Pars gas field (world's largest gas reserve).
- Targeted killings of key Iranian leaders, including senior security officials, indicate a "decapitation strategy."
- The conflict risks disruption of the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global energy chokepoint.
- The U.S. is facing limited international support, with NATO allies reluctant to engage.
- India is maintaining strategic neutrality and diplomatic engagement, ensuring safe passage of its energy shipments.

Key Points

- South Pars Gas Field: Shared by Iran and Qatar; accounts for a significant share of global gas reserves.
- Strait of Hormuz:
 - Handles ~20% of global oil trade (IEA estimates).
 - Critical for India's imports of crude oil, LNG, LPG.
- Decapitation Strategy:
 - Aimed at destabilizing leadership to trigger regime change.
 - Historically linked with unintended instability (e.g., Iraq, Libya).

- US Isolation:
 - European nations, Japan, Australia, Canada have refused military involvement.
- India's Stakes:
 - ~1 crore Indians reside in the Gulf region (MEA data).
 - Remittances from Gulf form a major share of India's inflows.
 - India imports ~60% of its crude oil from the Middle East (Economic Survey).

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz as a strategic chokepoint in global trade routes.
- India's energy import dependence and vulnerability to supply shocks.
- Role of diaspora in foreign policy and remittance economy.
- Principles of strategic autonomy and non-alignment in foreign policy.
- Impact of geopolitical conflicts on global oil prices and inflation.

Critical Analysis

Pros

- India's balanced diplomacy preserves ties with all stakeholders.
- Enhances credibility as a neutral power.

Cons

- Oil supply disruption risk.
- Threat to diaspora safety.
- Inflationary pressure on economy.

Challenges

- Maintaining neutrality amid pressure.
- Securing energy supply chains.

Way Forward

- Diversify energy sources (renewables, alternate suppliers).
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Strengthen diplomatic engagement in West Asia.
- Ensure diaspora safety mechanisms.

A Bill that narrows, not expands, rights

IF DEMOCRACY is based on the individuality and dignity of man... we have to recognise the right of a human being to choose his/her gender identity, which is integral to his/her personality and is one of the most basic aspects of self-determination, dignity, and freedom." With these words, the Supreme Court in *NALSA vs Union of India* (2014) recognised the third gender as a category and trans persons' right to determine their own gender identity as integral to the right to life and dignity. The protections and rights assured by NALSA and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, could now be undermined by the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026.

The Bill limits the definition of who the state would recognise as a transgender person to biological and cultural markers: "A person having such socio-cultural identities as kinn(a)r, hijra, aravani and jogta...", intersex people and persons who have been "forced" to present as transgender. This means the state would cease to recognise the right to choose one's own gender identity, excluding lakhs of people for whom the legislation was framed — trans men, trans women outside the communities listed, genderqueer, and non-binary people. To identify and protect a "genuine" class of "oppressed" transgender persons, the Bill proposes the examination of trans persons by a district medical board. It fails to recognise that sex may be physically determined, gender identity is not. It is also impossible to diagnose "oppression" through medical examination. Many in the process of transitioning and/or acquiring fresh documents will be left in limbo, and those outside recognised categories may see their documents invalidated. By making it mandatory for medical institutions to share details of persons undergoing gender-affirming surgeries with the DM, the Bill violates the right to privacy enshrined in *Puttaswamy* (2018).

While the larger objective of the Bill — wider implementation of protections and welfare measures — is worthy, the solution cannot be a narrowing of categories. Instead, institutional capacity, political will and understanding must be expanded. At a time when the world is seeing a rollback in the scant protections for trans people, India has the opportunity to offer its citizens safety, autonomy, and dignity. It should not, instead, walk back on rights.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 proposes changes to the existing 2019 Act.
- It narrows the definition of transgender persons to specific socio-cultural identities (e.g., hijra, kinnar, etc.).
- It introduces medical board certification for recognition of transgender identity.
- Concerns have arisen that the Bill may dilute the progressive principles laid down in *NALSA v. Union of India* (2014) and subsequent legal developments.
- The move comes amid global debates on gender identity and rollback of protections in some countries.

Key Points

- **Restriction in Definition:** Limits recognition to certain traditional communities and intersex persons.
- **Exclusion Issue:** Trans men, trans women outside listed groups, non-binary and genderqueer persons may be excluded.
- **Medicalisation of Identity:** Mandatory verification by district medical boards contradicts self-identification principle.
- **Privacy Concerns:** Requirement for hospitals to share gender-affirming surgery data with authorities may violate privacy rights.

- **Administrative Impact:** Existing identity documents of transgender persons may become invalid.
- **Contradiction with Judicial Precedents:**
 - *NALSA* (2014): Recognised self-identification of gender.
 - *Puttaswamy* (2017/18): Recognised right to privacy as fundamental right.

Static Linkages

- Fundamental Rights include Right to Equality (Articles 14–18) and Right to Life & Personal Liberty (Article 21).
- The concept of constitutional morality ensures protection of minority rights.
- Directive Principles promote social justice and welfare of marginalized groups.
- The Supreme Court has expanded Article 21 to include dignity, autonomy, and identity.
- India follows a rights-based approach to vulnerable groups under welfare legislation.

Critical Analysis

Issues

- Violates self-identification principle
- Promotes medicalisation of identity
- Exclusion of large transgender population
- Privacy concerns (data sharing)
- Administrative challenges (document validity)

Positives

- Attempts targeted welfare delivery
- Recognises traditional transgender communities

Way Forward

- Restore self-identification principle
- Adopt inclusive definition of gender identity
- Ensure privacy safeguards
- Focus on implementation of welfare schemes
- Sensitisation of institutions