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SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH

Iran grants India, 4 others Hormuz passage

Ships from India, China, Russia, Iraq, and Pak. can pass through the Strait, says Iran Foreign Minister

Minister thanks India, Sri Lanka for transferring naval ships facing U.S. threat to a safe location

President Trump has said Iran should 'get serious before it's too late, after that there's no way back'

Stanly Johny

India and four other "friendly nations" were allowed to move their ships through the Strait of Hormuz, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said, adding that Tehran has established its "sovereignty" over the waterway connecting the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

He also thanked India and Sri Lanka for their "significant help" after an Iranian vessel, *IRIS Dena*, was sunk in a U.S. attack in the Indian Ocean during the conflict and said no talks were being held with Washington.

"We permitted passage through the Strait of Hormuz for friendly nations including China, Russia, India, Iraq, and Pakistan," Mr. Araghchi said in an interview with the Iran News Network that was broadcast on Wednesday night.

"The Strait of Hormuz is located in the territorial waters of Iran and Oman, and Iran's sovereignty is established there. After the war, we will also have new arrangements for passing through the Strait," he said.

"In the incident of the *Dena* ship, which was unfairly attacked without any warning, I must thank Sri Lanka and India for their significant help in transferring two other ships to a safe location," he added.

The Iranian frigate was attacked and sunk by a U.S. Navy submarine on March 4 off the coast of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean while returning from exercises in Visakhapatnam. At least 87 sailors were killed in the attack.

IRIS Lavan and *IRIS Bushehr*, which also came to the region to take part in the drills, have now docked in Kochi and Sri Lanka's Trincomalee, respectively.

The tanker Apollo Ocean unloads cargo collected from the vessel *Shivalik* in Mangaluru on Thursday. *Shivalik* is one of four Indian ships which crossed the Strait of Hormuz recently. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Strait of Hormuz, through which more than a hundred ships passed daily before the war, has seen traffic plunge to single digits since the conflict began.

At least four India-flagged ships – *Jag Vasant*, *Pine Gas*, *Shivalik*, and *Nanda Devi* – have transited the strait since the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Iran on February 28.

Mr. Araghchi, who was Iran's chief negotiator with the U.S. before the war, also said no talks were being held with the U.S.

"I state firmly that there has been no negotiation with the U.S. However, in recent days, the American side has begun sending various messages through different intermediaries.. and we have responded by stating our positions. It is simply an exchange of messages through friends," he said.

"At present, our position is to continue resisting, continue defending our country. We have no intention of negotiating."

Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said "indirect talks" between the two sides are taking place through messages being relayed by Pakistan.

"The U.S. has shared 15 points, being deliberated upon by Iran. Brotherly countries of Turkiye and Egypt, among others, are also extending their support to this initiative," Mr. Dar wrote in a social media post.

Mr. Trump on Thursday said Iran should "better get serious soon" in talks, "before it's too late, because once that happens, there is no turning back". U.S. media have reported that the Pentagon is sending more troops to West Asia in preparation for a possible ground offensive against Iran.

AT AN IMPASSE
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India has oil for 60 days, LPG supplies for one month: govt.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

In a bid to end speculation about India's energy stocks amid the escalating tensions in West Asia, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) on Thursday said that India has so far arranged a month of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) supplies through imports, with constant additional procurement ongoing.

A statement said that India has reduced its reliance on imports for LPG, with the country producing "much more" than it needs to import.

On crude oil, the government said Indian oil companies have secured supplies that would suffice for the next 60 days, while the country already holds stocks enough for 60 days.

These 60 days of current stocks, which include crude, diesel and petrol, are an increase over the 50 days of total stocks the government had said it had at the start of the war.

Cumulatively, India currently has a total reserve (storage) capacity of 74 days of fuel stocks, including crude oil, petrol, and diesel.

'Local production up'

"Nearly two months of steady supply is available for every Indian citizen regardless of what happens globally," the Ministry said. "Next two months of crude procurement has also been secured. India is completely secure for the next many months and the quantity in strategic cavern storage becomes secondary in such a supply situation."

While emphasising that there is no LPG shortage in the country, the government said that India was now producing more LPG than it needs to import. It said that, since the LPG control order issued earlier, domestic refinery production has been ramped up by 40%. This, it said, has brought the daily output to 50,000 tonnes, which is more than 60% of domestic requirements.

Additionally, with respect to imports, the government said that 8,000,000 tonnes of LPG cargoes are en route to India from the United States, Russia, Australia, and other countries.

"Approximately one full month of supply is firmly arranged, with additional procurement being finalised continuously," it stated.

Earlier in the day, Vikas Kaushal, managing director at state-owned Hindustan Petroleum said, "Over the past two days, sales have increased by more than 15% on an all-India basis... our supply chains remain strong, our refineries are fully stocked."

'Cargo-charge waiver draws more tankers'

MANGALURU

With the New Mangalore Port Authority (NMPA) waiving cargo charges for liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and crude oil tankers to attract vessels for tiding over geopolitical crisis in West Asia, more vessels are sailing into the port.

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India eyes local currency trade for West Asian oil

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The Centre is "experimenting" with conducting trade with the West Asian countries in local currencies, in a bid to mitigate the fiscal double-hit of surging oil prices and a depreciating rupee, according to two senior officials in the government.

Another objective is to save on currency conversion costs.

If this fructifies, it would mean India would be paying for about 80% of its oil imports using local currencies rather than the U.S. dollar. "India is working out a mechanism to pay for imports from the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] countries in local currencies," a senior government official said.

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U.S. President Donald Trump, who "postponed" on Monday a threatened strike on Iran's power infrastructure, has said Washington is in talks with Tehran. Pakistan's Deputy

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Strait of Hormuz emerged as a major geopolitical flashpoint amid the ongoing conflict involving Iran, United States and Israel.
- Iran claimed it allowed selective passage to "friendly nations" including India, China, and Russia, asserting sovereignty over the strait.
- An Iranian naval vessel (IRIS Dena) was sunk by a U.S. submarine near Sri Lanka, escalating tensions.
- India assisted Iran in securing its naval assets during the conflict.
- Disruptions in the Strait reduced maritime traffic drastically, affecting global oil supply chains.
- India is exploring local currency trade mechanisms with Gulf nations to reduce dependence on the US dollar amid rising oil prices and rupee depreciation.
- Government assured energy security with ~60 days of crude supply and 74 days of total fuel reserves.

Key Points

- Strategic chokepoint:
  - ~20–25% of global oil trade passes through the Strait of Hormuz (as per EIA estimates).
- Iran's stance:
  - Claims partial control and plans new arrangements for passage post-conflict.
- India's role:
  - Assisted Iranian ships; continues oil import operations through the strait.
- Energy security measures:
  - 60 days of crude oil secured + 60 days existing stock.
  - Total fuel reserve capacity: ~74 days.
- LPG scenario:
  - Domestic production increased by ~40%.
  - ~8 lakh tonnes of LPG imports en route.
- Currency strategy:
  - Proposal to settle ~80% of oil imports in local currencies (especially with GCC nations).
- Geopolitical signals:
  - No formal Iran-US negotiations, but indirect communication continues via intermediaries like Pakistan, Türkiye, and Egypt.

Static Linkages

- Strait as a chokepoint in global trade routes affecting energy security.
- India imports ~85% of its crude oil requirements (Economic Survey data trend).
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs) in India (Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, Padur).
- Concept of Current Account Deficit (CAD) linked to oil imports.
- International maritime law: UNCLOS provisions on transit passage through straits.
- Exchange rate depreciation and its impact on import bills.

Issues & Challenges

- Geopolitical Risk: Conflict near Strait of Hormuz threatens supply routes.
- High Import Dependence: ~85% crude import makes India vulnerable.
- Price Volatility: Oil shocks → inflation + CAD worsening.
- Currency Pressure: Rupee depreciation raises import bill; local currency trade uncertain.
- Maritime Security: Attacks/insurance risks increase shipping costs.
- Diplomatic Tightrope: Balancing Iran–United States relations.
- Limited SPR Coverage: Strategic reserves insufficient for long disruptions.

Way Forward

- Diversify Imports: Reduce reliance on West Asia.
- Expand SPRs: Increase storage capacity.
- Energy Diplomacy: Secure long-term supply agreements.
- Local Currency Trade: Strengthen rupee-based mechanisms.
- Boost Domestic Output: Enhance exploration & refining.
- Renewable Push: Scale solar, wind, green hydrogen.
- Maritime Security: Strengthen naval presence & cooperation.
- Energy Efficiency: Promote EVs, ethanol blending.

The key to India's multi-domain deterrence, capabilities

China's military poses a serious challenge to India. New Delhi has no choice but to pursue a robust industrial strategy to offset China's military advantage. Otherwise, it risks the widening of the capability gap. But bridging this gap requires political expediency to make urgent, hard policy choices – what to buy, what to build, and the potential costs and benefits. The challenge is that technology is evolving faster than doctrine, making precise choices even more difficult. The question is how India should reconceptualise its doctrinal and technological choices and adopt a credible defence-industrial strategy to deter the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Harinder Singh
A retired Lieutenant General and a former corps commander

Hard choices, systemic vulnerabilities

There could be three contrasting ways to approach the issue. First, India could adopt a bold approach. It would imply betting on the right technological trends and investing in a completely new bundle of war-fighting technologies. The risk is if implementation fails, it can create acute capability vulnerabilities and further weaken the margin of deterrence with India's adversaries. Besides, India lacks the industrial heft to produce technologies at scale and speed to neutralise China's advantage. But, if successful, it could help reduce the capability gap.

Second, India could consider a more conservative strategy. This would entail integrating a wide range of emerging technologies with those in-service to make the existing force more effective. It would also entail enhancing India's cyber, space and electronic warfare capabilities to digitise the battlespace, to streamline and condense the kill chains. This is entirely doable, but it would not alter the balance of power. Perhaps, this strategy is more suited to fight a short war with Pakistan, not a protracted conflict.

Third, India could explore the middle path. While it continues to rely on legacy platforms, it invests in the creation and deployment of enabling layers, to enhance its ability to deter China. While, multi-domain operations (MDO) should be the obvious choice; India is not there yet for a mix of reasons. Besides, MDO as a concept is difficult to define, and even more difficult to operationalise. This would entail fielding a set of crucial enabling layers – of Command and Control (C2), Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), deep-strike, close-battle, infrastructure and logistics, which are critical to war outcomes. As these layers evolve, India's military would shape into a syncretic, multi-domain force. Historically, military transformations have adopted well-known paths. It entails aligning research, development and industrial capacity, doctrines and structures and technology and tactics across institutions, and over time, to deter threats. National security institutions, including the military, have to work together to develop a common picture of the deterrence that the state wishes to create. Since India's margin of deterrence against China is uncertain, India's endeavour should be to analyse the factors that explain the systemic challenges to building a robust posture. Two aspects stand out. First, India's industrial challenges are well known. Its ability to translate its military requirements into industrial targets is doubtful. The issue is not its technological competence but its defence-industrial base, which is not structured to deliver at speed and scale. Missiles, munitions and drones are urgent industrial investments of the day; so are the ISR and C2 networks and shortfalls in legacy platforms. India needs to expand its defence-industrial base in conjunction with private industry; otherwise, it may continue to face constraints.

A robust defence-industrial base will shape India's multi-domain deterrence and resilience, especially against China

While there is no one-off solution to coordinating industrial capacity, technology and doctrine, incremental steps can generate benefits in the long term. Removing red tape, ensuring budgetary stability, and providing long-term contracts especially for specialised platforms could prove helpful. A mindset change recognising that private players can build military systems more efficiently than the government sector, is needed. It is never too late to shore up the system, but the window for industrial reform is clearly shrinking.

Second, India's procurement system has to focus on evolving and not constraining the fighting force. The system has to adapt faster and be rooted in an efficient defence-industrial base that can produce what an evolving force needs. India needs to spend more, but spend smarter by making hard choices in prioritising key deterrent capabilities. This will require the broadest possible debate and consensus on what needs to be done, and why. It is also the military's job to explain its roles and tasks to the political leadership, the costs of inaction and possible trade-offs, and how they impact the deterrence that India wishes to achieve.

Fixing the enabling layers

Strengthening India's deterrence would mean altering China's military confidence, while preventing it from assuming that any single capability could prove decisive. This is more so when India has no single capability which is exquisite enough to alter the military balance. By creating and operationalising the enabling layers – C2, ISR, deep-strike, close-battle and others – India can aspire to field a capable multi-domain force, to deter the Chinese.

India must have two top priorities. First, to identify those military vulnerabilities that present an advantage to China. Its fledgling C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) is one such concern. Dominating the C4ISR battle is key: the side that can see can continue to fight. India needs cheap ISR platforms, in numbers which it can afford to lose, yet maintain ISR capacity. It even needs superior cyber, space and electronic warfare capabilities to deceive and degrade the adversary's ISR platforms. A layered C4ISR – one that enhances one's ISR capacity, while limiting an adversary's ability – is vital.

There are other layers, as well. For instance, the integration of missiles, aircraft and drones as the strike layer to dislocate the enemy in depth. The coordinated employment of land-based platforms such as tanks, guns, and infantry vehicles as a layer to fight front-line battles is crucial. A robust logistic layer that integrates all rear-zone elements including logistic installations, supply chains, and infrastructure is essential for fighting a protracted war. Equally important, in India's case, will be its nuclear deterrent, and how much nuclear capability it needs to compensate for a lack of conventional deterrence to dissuade a nuclear adversary such as China.

Second, India needs to incentivise the right parts of the defence industrial base, by making one-off budgetary allocations in select capabilities. China has a sizeable missile inventory and has the industrial capacity to produce thousands more, during conflict. If a conflict erupts, it can use these against India, with devastating effect. Even if India were to withstand the initial PLA strikes, it would put severe pressure on India's surge capacity. This inventory gap is a risky bet. India has to incentivise defence production, in the absence of which, China might be tempted to drag India into a protracted fight.

India should, therefore, be spending less time admiring the service-specific acquisitions, and fix the critical enabling layers in the deterrence system. Besides, theatre-isation alone might not help create these layers, unless it is rooted in deep doctrinal convergence.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Concerns are rising over the widening military capability gap between India and China, particularly due to the rapid modernization of the People's Liberation Army.
- India faces pressure to adopt a robust defence-industrial strategy to maintain credible deterrence.
- Debate has emerged on whether India should adopt a bold technological leap, a conservative modernization approach, or a balanced "middle path" strategy.
- The issue is compounded by evolving military technologies outpacing doctrinal adaptation and procurement reforms.

Key Points

- Three strategic approaches:Bold strategy: Invest in next-gen technologies (AI, drones, hypersonics) → high risk–high reward.
- Conservative strategy: Upgrade existing systems + integrate emerging tech → limited deterrence impact.
- Middle path: Combine legacy systems with enabling layers (C2, ISR, logistics) → most viable.
- Critical vulnerabilities:Weak defence-industrial base (production scale & speed issues).
- Inadequate C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance).
- Procurement delays and bureaucratic inefficiencies.
- Priority capability areas:Missiles, drones, and munitions stockpiles.
- Cyber, space, and electronic warfare.
- Integrated logistics and infrastructure.
- Multi-domain operations (land, air, sea, cyber, space).
- China's advantage:Large missile inventory and rapid manufacturing capacity.
- Strong civil-military fusion model.

Static Linkages

- Deterrence theory: Credible minimum deterrence and second-strike capability.
- Concept of "Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)" and network-centric warfare.
- Role of public-private partnership in strategic sectors.
- Importance of logistics in warfare (e.g., WW-II lessons).
- Budgetary allocation vs capital expenditure in defence.

Critical Analysis

Advantages:

- Push for Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence
- Emphasis on modern warfare (AI, cyber, drones)
- Private sector role → efficiency gains

Challenges:

- Weak defence-industrial base
- Budget constraints
- Slow procurement system
- Lack of doctrinal clarity in multi-domain operations
- Technology evolving faster than policy

Way Forward

- Strengthen C4ISR capabilities
- Boost missile, drone, and ammunition production
- Reform procurement system (speed + transparency)
- Ensure long-term defence contracts
- Enhance private sector participation
- Invest in cyber, space, electronic warfare
- Focus on logistics & infrastructure for long wars

A mislabelling of a Supreme Court handbook

In February this year, during a hearing on a sexual assault case, the Chief Justice of India (CJI), Justice Surya Kant, remarked that the Supreme Court Handbook – *Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes* – released in 2023 by then CJI D.Y. Chandrachud to combat gender stereotypes, was 'technical' and 'too Harvard-oriented. The CJI requested the National Judicial Academy to constitute a panel of domain experts, academicians and lawyers to review the handbook and submit a report. It was noted during the hearing that the forensic terms used in the handbook to describe different aspects of sexual assault cases may not be readily understood by survivors, their families, or laypersons. The Court also emphasised the need for greater practical training of judges.

Not 'Harvard-oriented' at all

While the emphasis on judicial training is welcome, a close reading of the handbook suggests that it is far from 'Harvard-oriented'. On the contrary, it is firmly grounded in Indian precedent and courtroom realities. By its own terms, the handbook sets out three modest but important objectives – first, to identify language in judicial reasoning that perpetuates gender stereotypes and to suggest alternatives; second, to highlight common reasoning patterns based on such stereotypes and explain why they are incorrect; and third, to compile binding decisions of the Supreme Court of India that have already rejected these stereotypes.

After explaining the impact of stereotypes on judicial reasoning, the handbook provides, in a tabulated format, stereotype promoting language alongside recommended alternatives, which are further supported by case law. The goal is to ensure that judicial language aligns with constitutional commitments to dignity and equality.

Tiasha Mukherjee

Lawyer and a Master of Law candidate at the University of Cambridge

Calling the 'Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes' Harvard-oriented overlooks its practical, context-driven guidance

Judgments and language

Consider, for instance, the Court's decision in 2010 in *D. Velusamy vs D. Patchaiammal*. In discussing whether a live-in relationship would qualify as a "relationship in the nature of marriage" under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, the Court used the term "keep" to describe a woman "he maintains financially and uses mainly for sexual purpose and/or as a servant". The language later drew sharp criticism in court, from then Additional Solicitor General Indira Jaising for its patriarchal connotations. The handbook flags precisely such expressions to ensure that future judgments avoid sexist language.

Similarly, Indian judgments have at times used the word "ravished" to describe rape. The term carries archaic, moralistic undertones, focusing more on romantic connotations than on consent and bodily autonomy. The use of problematic language in judgments in India has been documented for decades by feminist legal scholars. Across jurisdictions, initiatives such as the feminist judgments project have demonstrated how landmark rulings can be rewritten without patriarchal underpinnings.

The handbook, in its final section, lists key judgments that reject the stereotypes identified earlier. These are settled principles of law which are brought together in a structured and accessible manner. For instance, it is noted that the absence of injuries in a sexual violence case must be evaluated contextually. This has also been cited recently by the Court in an order concerning sexual assault where it was noted that there is no 'correct' or 'appropriate' way for a survivor to behave.

Who the handbook is meant for

More importantly, to call the handbook 'too technical' risks misunderstanding its audience. It is not addressed to survivors. It is addressed to judges and lawyers who are professionals trained to interpret statutes, weigh evidence and craft reasoned judgments.

None of this is to suggest that the handbook is beyond improvement. The handbook must evolve, particularly in response to feedback from the Bench, the bar and civil society. But, reform should be informed by an accurate understanding of what the document actually does.

The publication of the handbook marked a significant institutional acknowledgment: that language can entrench or dismantle inequality. By identifying stereotypes and grounding judicial reasoning in constitutional values, the Court took a step toward greater internal accountability. Calling it 'technical' and 'Harvard-oriented' risks diminishing the significance of that step.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- During a hearing on a sexual assault case, the Chief Justice of India Justice Surya Kant remarked that the Supreme Court Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes (2023) was "technical" and "too Harvard-oriented".
- The handbook was released under former CJI D. Y. Chandrachud.
- The Court directed the National Judicial Academy to review the handbook via a panel of experts.
- Concern raised: forensic/legal terminology may not be easily understood by survivors and laypersons.
- Court emphasized need for practical judicial training alongside doctrinal material.

Key Points

- Objective of the Handbook (2023):
  - Identify stereotypical language in judicial reasoning.
  - Suggest constitutionally appropriate alternatives.
  - Compile binding Supreme Court precedents rejecting gender stereotypes.
- Nature of Content:
  - Based on Indian case law, not foreign theory.
  - Provides tabulated examples of problematic language vs. neutral alternatives.
- Judicial Language Concerns:
  - Terms like "ravished" or "keep" reflect patriarchal biases.
  - Example: D. Velusamy vs D. Patchaiammal used problematic terminology in live-in relationship context.
- Legal Principle Highlighted:
  - No "uniform behaviour" expected from sexual assault survivors.
  - Absence of injuries does not negate assault (as per SC precedents).
- Target Audience:
  - Judges and lawyers (not general public).
  - Aimed at improving judicial reasoning and courtroom language.

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before law and equal protection of laws.
- Article 15(1) & 15(3) – Prohibition of discrimination and protective discrimination for women.
- Article 21 – Right to life with dignity (expanded via judicial interpretation).
- Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 – Recognises "relationship in the nature of marriage".
- Justice Verma Committee Report (2013) – Emphasized gender-sensitive judicial processes.
- NCRB Reports – Highlight issues of underreporting and victim treatment.
- Law Commission Reports (172nd, 273rd) – Reforms in rape laws and victim protection.

Critical Analysis

Pros

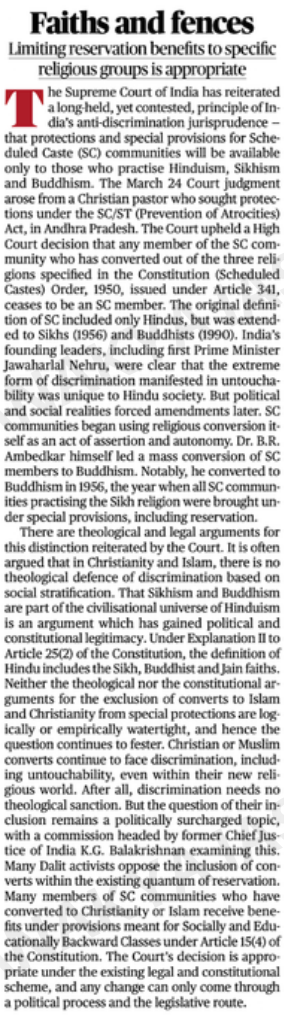
- Promotes gender-just jurisprudence.
- Removes patriarchal bias in judgments.
- Strengthens constitutional morality (Art. 14, 21).
- Institutional recognition of bias in judiciary.

Cons / Issues

- Perceived over-technical nature.
- Implementation gap at lower judiciary levels.
- Limited accessibility for non-legal stakeholders.
- Requires training support for effective use.

Way Forward

- Simplify language without compromising legal precision.
- Mandatory integration in judicial training (NJA).
- Regular updates based on case laws.
- Sensitization of police, prosecutors, judiciary.
- Promote gender-sensitive legal education.



Faiths and fences

Limiting reservation benefits to specific religious groups is appropriate

The Supreme Court of India has reiterated a long-held, yet contested, principle of India's anti-discrimination jurisprudence – that protections and special provisions for Scheduled Caste (SC) communities will be available only to those who practise Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. The March 24 Court judgment arose from a Christian pastor who sought protections under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, in Andhra Pradesh. The Court upheld a High Court decision that any member of the SC community who has converted out of the three religions specified in the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, issued under Article 341, ceases to be an SC member. The original definition of SC included only Hindus, but was extended to Sikhs (1956) and Buddhists (1990). India's founding leaders, including first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, were clear that the extreme form of discrimination manifested in untouchability was unique to Hindu society. But political and social realities forced amendments later. SC communities began using religious conversion itself as an act of assertion and autonomy. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar himself led a mass conversion of SC members to Buddhism. Notably, he converted to Buddhism in 1956, the year when all SC communities practising the Sikh religion were brought under special provisions, including reservation.

There are theological and legal arguments for this distinction reiterated by the Court. It is often argued that in Christianity and Islam, there is no theological defence of discrimination based on social stratification. That Sikhism and Buddhism are part of the civilisational universe of Hinduism is an argument which has gained political and constitutional legitimacy. Under Explanation II to Article 25(2) of the Constitution, the definition of Hindu includes the Sikh, Buddhist and Jain faiths. Neither the theological nor the constitutional arguments for the exclusion of converts to Islam and Christianity from special protections are logically or empirically watertight, and hence the question continues to fester. Christian or Muslim converts continue to face discrimination, including untouchability, even within their new religious world. After all, discrimination needs no theological sanction. But the question of their inclusion remains a politically surcharged topic, with a commission headed by former Chief Justice of India K.G. Balakrishnan examining this. Many Dalit activists oppose the inclusion of converts within the existing quantum of reservation. Many members of SC communities who have converted to Christianity or Islam receive benefits under provisions meant for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes under Article 15(4) of the Constitution. The Court's decision is appropriate under the existing legal and constitutional scheme, and any change can only come through a political process and the legislative route.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Supreme Court of India (March 24, 2026) reaffirmed that Scheduled Caste (SC) status is restricted to Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists.
- Case arose from a Christian pastor in Andhra Pradesh seeking protection under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.
- Court upheld that conversion outside specified religions leads to loss of SC status, as per the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 under Article 341.
- The Order originally included only Hindus; later extended to Sikhs (1956) and Buddhists (1990).

Key Points

- Article 341: Empowers the President to specify SCs; Parliament can amend the list.
- Constitution (SC) Order, 1950: Restricts SC status to specific religions.
- Judicial Position:
  - SC status linked to historical practice of untouchability.
  - Conversion is seen as breaking from caste-based disabilities (legal assumption).
- Socio-political reality:
  - Evidence shows Dalit converts to Christianity and Islam still face caste-based discrimination.
- Alternative provisions:
  - Converted SCs may access benefits under SEBC/OBC category via Article 15(4).
- Committee in focus:
  - Commission headed by K. G. Balakrishnan examining inclusion issue.
- Historical dimension:
  - B. R. Ambedkar led mass conversion to Buddhism (1956).
  - Jawaharlal Nehru viewed untouchability as rooted in Hindu social structure.

Static Linkages

- Article 14, 15, 16 – Equality and affirmative action framework
- Article 17 – Abolition of untouchability
- Article 25(2) Explanation II – Defines "Hindu" to include Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains
- SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 – Protection against caste atrocities
- Mandal Commission & Indra Sawhney Case (1992) – Reservation jurisprudence
- Concept of "protective discrimination" (NCERT – Indian Polity)

Critical Analysis

Arguments Supporting the Judgment

- Constitutional validity: Based strictly on Article 341 and Presidential Order.
- Historical rationale: Untouchability linked to Hindu caste system.
- Reservation dilution concern: Inclusion may reduce benefits for existing SCs.
- Legal clarity: Maintains consistency in affirmative action framework.

Arguments Against the Judgment

- Ground reality mismatch: Caste discrimination persists post-conversion.
- Violation of equality (Article 14): Religion-based exclusion appears arbitrary.
- Freedom of religion (Article 25) indirectly constrained.
- Empirical gap: No robust data supporting assumption that conversion removes caste stigma.

Stakeholder Perspectives

- Dalit activists: Divided—some support inclusion, others fear quota dilution.
- Religious minorities: Demand recognition of "caste among converts".
- State: Balancing social justice with political sensitivities.

Way Forward

- Evidence-based policy: Use socio-economic surveys (like SECC) to assess discrimination among converts.
- Sub-categorisation within SC quota to address dilution concerns.
- Parliamentary intervention: Amend Constitution (SC) Order, 1950 if required.
- Strengthen anti-discrimination laws irrespective of religion.
- Judicial review scope: Revisit link between caste and religion in evolving society.
- Awareness & social reform: Address caste beyond legal categories.

Tepid promises

India must enhance battery storage to fully use non-fossil capacity

India came in late, but it was worth the wait. A section of the Paris Agreement, under which all countries except the United States have agreed to keep temperatures from rising beyond 2°C of pre-Industrial times, requires updating their targets every five years from 2020. As of December last year, India and Argentina were the only two G-20 countries that had not announced updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) for 2035. This was despite India's Environment Minister committing at COP30 in Brazil, in November 2025, to update by the 'year-end'. The saving grace is that this happened in time before Financial Year 2025-26 ends in a week. The latest set of NDCs by India commits to, by 2035, an installed electric capacity that is 60% from non-fossil sources; reducing, by 47%, the intensity of emissions per unit of GDP and having a 3.5 billion tonne-4 billion tonne CO_2 carbon sink. This is an update over India's 2020 NDCs: of an installed electric capacity that is 50% from non-fossil sources; reducing, by 45%, the intensity of emissions per unit of GDP and having a 2.5 billion tonne-3 billion tonne CO_2 carbon sink. Thus, the necessary boxes have been ticked.

The EU has committed to a 40%-49% cut below 2005 levels. As a developing nation, India – a significant contributor of net emissions in recent years but below the world average in per capita emissions – will not cut annual emissions but promises to emit less carbon per unit of energy and source more of its power from non-fossil sources. It has also committed to being net zero by 2070 through increasing its tree and forest cover (which absorb CO_2) and the recently announced technology pathways such as carbon capture, utilisation, and storage. India's 2035 goals are easily achievable and the government has expressed that plainly. India already met its 2030 non-fossil target last year, with 52% capacity installed. The rub is that only about 25% of the power generated is non-fossil due to insufficient battery storage which is unable to harness all the available solar and wind power. The Power Ministry's National Generation Adequacy Plan itself expects 70% of the projected installed 1,121 GW capacity by 2035-36 to be non-fossil. It is tempting to laud India for embellishing its green commitments amidst a war in West Asia that has squeezed supply of a vital fossil fuel. However, without actual improvements in generated supply, these numbers mean little. With the war demonstrating the chokehold that a fossil fuel has, India must exhibit more urgency toward enhancing battery storage and improving its electric grid to better utilise existing non-fossil capacity.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Under the Paris Agreement, countries must update their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) every 5 years starting 2020.
- India delayed its updated NDCs for 2035 despite a commitment at COP30.
- India and Argentina were the only G-20 nations pending submission as of Dec 2025.
- India has now submitted updated NDCs before FY 2025–26 closure.

Key Points

- New 2035 Targets (Updated NDCs):
  - 60% installed electric capacity from non-fossil sources
  - 47% reduction in emissions intensity of GDP (from 2005 levels)
- Carbon sink:
  - 3.5–4 billion tonnes CO_2
  - Earlier 2020 Targets:50% non-fossil capacity
  - 45% emission intensity reduction
  - 2.5–3 billion tonnes CO_2 sink
- Other Commitments:
  - Net-zero target by 2070
  - Focus on carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS)
- Current Status:
  - India already achieved 52% installed non-fossil capacity (2024)
  - However, only ~25% actual power generation is non-fossil
- Structural Issue:
  - Lack of battery storage + grid inefficiency
  - National Generation Adequacy Plan: 70% non-fossil capacity by 2035-36

Static Linkages

- Climate change: Greenhouse effect, carbon cycle
- Mitigation vs Adaptation strategies
- Renewable energy sources: solar, wind, hydro
- Carbon sequestration: forests as carbon sinks
- Energy security and energy mix in India
- Sustainable development & intergenerational equity
- India's constitutional duty: Article 48A, 51A(g)

Critical Analysis

Strengths

- Shows commitment to global climate regime
- Targets are realistic and achievable
- Aligns with principle of climate justice (low per capita emissions)
- Encourages renewable energy expansion

Limitations

- Focus on installed capacity rather than actual generation
- Insufficient storage technology reduces renewable utilisation
- Continued reliance on coal for baseload power
- Marginal increase in ambition (45% → 47%)
- Delay affects India's credibility

Key Issue

- Gap between capacity creation vs actual energy generation

Way Forward

- Develop large-scale battery storage systems
- Upgrade grid infrastructure & transmission networks
- Promote green hydrogen and hybrid energy systems
- Gradually reduce coal dependency with a just transition
- Strengthen carbon markets and pricing mechanisms
- Enhance forest cover for carbon sinks
- Shift policy focus from capacity to actual energy output

India's new climate targets are modest but significant

As the US retreats from renewables and climate financing hopes falter, India has signalled that it remains committed to clean energy pathway

AMITABH SINHA

INDIA ON Wednesday revealed its climate targets for 2035, promising to make further progress on cutting the carbon intensity of its economy, expanding the deployment of renewable energy and creating carbon sinks from forests and trees.

India said it would ensure that at least 60% of its electricity installed capacity in 2035 was based on non-fossil fuel sources, up from the 50% target it had set for 2030. It has promised to attain at least a 47% reduction in emissions intensity, or emissions per unit of GDP, on 2005 levels, which is two percentage points more than its current target of 45% for 2030. And, it has promised to create a carbon sink that is at least 3.5 to 4 billion tonnes of CO2-equivalent larger than what existed in 2005.

Each of the new targets marks a progression over existing commitments for 2030, a mandatory requirement under the 2015 Paris Agreement. Under this 2015 pact, every country is obligated to decide upon, and implement, a set of climate actions that help the global fight against climate change. These are referred to as nationally-determined contributions, or NDCs — emphasising the fact that countries themselves decide the nature and scale of climate actions.

The signals from India

On the face of it, India's new climate targets seem to be only a slight enhancement over its existing 2030 commitments, which it is on course to achieve well ahead of time. The renewable energy target has already been met and the other two might also be close to being achieved once fresh data on those indicators are available.

However, India's reaffirmation of the clean energy pathway it has chosen for itself is extremely important in the current global situation in which countries are being forced to reevaluate their policy options regarding energy, economy and security.

The chain of events triggered by Donald Trump's re-election as President of the US has resulted in a serious erosion in global efforts on climate change. These events have not just slowed down progress on climate, but threaten to reverse the momentum that was building on the replacement of fossil fuels with renewable energy.

The US under Trump has abandoned renewables and is reinvesting money and efforts towards developing and controlling oil and gas resources.

Such a reversal by the world's second largest producer and consumer of energy has had major consequences. Washington's pursuit of greater control over the world's oil and gas resources, as reflected in its actions in Venezuela, and the war in West Asia have unnerved several countries, forcing them to make renewed attempts to secure their own oil and gas supply chains.

In this backdrop, India, the world's third biggest emitter and the third largest consumer of energy, has signalled that it remains committed to the clean energy pathway and enhanced climate action.

Small steps

India's third set of nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) makes small upgrades to the last one

	NDC-1	NDC-2	NDC-3	PROGRESS
Year of announcement	2015	2022	2026	
Target year	2030	2030	2035	
Goal 1: Reducing emissions intensity (emissions per unit GDP)	33-35% from 2005 levels	45% from 2005 levels	47% from 2005 levels	36% reduction achieved by 2020
Goal 2: Share of non-fossil electricity sources	40%	50%	60%	52% in February 2026
Goal 3: Creating additional carbon sinks (forests, trees)	2.5 to 3 bn tonnes over 2005 stock	2.5 to 3 bn tonnes over 2005 stock	3.5 to 4 bn tonnes over 2005 stock	2.3 bn tonnes created by 2021

Finding the money

India and other developing nations have said inadequate financing would compel them to scale down their climate actions

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Finding low-cost, long-term finance for green investments is a key objective in India's 2035 climate plan

UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Simon Stiell acknowledged the significance of India's new climate targets.

"The signals in this announcement from one of the world's largest and fastest-growing economies could not be more crucial, at a time when the soaring costs of dependence on volatile fossil fuels are becoming painfully clear, undermining national security and sovereignty around the world, driving up prices, and leaving people short of food and fuel. By contrast, renewable energy is not at the mercy of narrow shipping straits or huge naval escorts," he said, referring to the US-Israeli war on Iran that has led to the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz. The UN official said that India's new climate plan would deepen its economic advantage.

Disappointment with international finance

Considering the progress it has already made on its existing commitments, India, perhaps, was in a position to make bigger enhancements to its 2035 targets.

For example, a recently released document by the Central Electricity Authority projected that the share of non-fossil fuel sources in the electricity generation capacity could go from the current 52% to 70% by 2035. India, however, has set a target of only 60% in its NDC for 2035. This shows that the country would be willing to do more only whenever it can, and not want to be constrained by international commitments that have to be made in advance.

One of the reasons for India not aiming higher in its 2035 targets, despite seemingly being in a position to do so, could have something to do with its disappointment over the failure of the developed countries to make more money available for climate action.

India has been extremely unhappy with the outcome of the climate finance negotiations in Baku in 2024, where the developed countries only agreed to raise about $300 billion a year for the developing countries, and only from 2035. The developing countries had been demanding that at least $1.3 trillion a year be made available for them to finance their climate actions.

India has been consistently highlighting this issue at international forums. At the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Brazil last year, it managed to force through a decision on the creation of a two-year work programme to discuss all climate finance issues.

India has also been arguing that the lack of adequate money would compel countries such as itself to scale down the ambition of their climate actions. In fact, an Indian official had told *The Indian Express* that India's 2035 climate targets would very likely "reflect the disappointment of the climate finance outcome at COP29 in Baku".

As a result, finding low-cost, long-term finance — both from domestic as well as international sources — for green investments has been identified as one of the core objectives in India's 2035 climate plan.

With the relatively modest upgrade in targets, India also seems to be reiterating its position that while it remains fully committed to climate action, it would not allow international pressure to dictate the pace of those actions. India's 2035 NDC, which is yet to be published and submitted to UN Climate Change, is expected to have a strong emphasis on adaptation actions.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- India announced its updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for 2035 under the Paris Agreement.
- The update is part of the mandatory 5-year revision cycle required under global climate commitments.
- India reaffirmed its commitment to clean energy transition despite global uncertainty due to shifting policies in countries like the United States.
- The announcement comes amid concerns over inadequate climate finance from developed countries (notably after COP29 Baku Climate Conference outcomes).

Key Points

- Non-fossil fuel capacity target:
  - 60% of installed electricity capacity by 2035 (↑ from 50% target for 2030).
- Emissions intensity reduction:
  - 47% reduction from 2005 levels (↑ from 45% target for 2030).
- Carbon sink creation:
  - Additional 3.5–4 billion tonnes CO_2 equivalent via forests/tree cover.
- Progress status:
  - India is already on track to achieve 2030 targets ahead of time (as per government assessments).
- Strategic signalling:
  - Reinforces commitment to renewables despite global fossil fuel resurgence.
- Climate finance concern:
  - Developed nations pledged only $300 billion/year by 2035, far below $1.3 trillion demand of developing nations.
- Policy stance:
  - India prefers flexible commitments, avoiding over-ambitious binding targets without financial support.

Static Linkages

- Principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR-RC).
- Definition of carbon intensity (emissions/GDP).
- Role of carbon sinks (forests in climate mitigation).
- India's commitments under Panchamrit goals (COP26):
  - 500 GW non-fossil capacity by 2030
  - Net-zero target by 2070
- Role of institutions like:
  - Central Electricity Authority (CEA)
  - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
- Concepts:
  - Mitigation vs Adaptation
  - Energy security vs sustainability trade-off

Critical Points

Positives

- Reinforces India's clean energy transition
- Enhances energy security + sustainability balance
- Strengthens India's global climate leadership

Concerns

- Targets are conservative despite higher potential
- Dependence on climate finance from developed countries
- Implementation issues:
  - Land constraints
  - Renewable intermittency
  - Forest quality vs quantity

Way Forward

- Scale up renewable + storage (battery, hydrogen)
- Develop domestic carbon markets & green finance
- Improve afforestation quality (not just area)
- Push for equitable climate finance globally
- Focus on adaptation + resilience strategies

West Asia war is a warning. It's also a window to securing our energy

AMITABH KANT

THE TURBULENCE in West Asia is a reminder of a structural reality that India has long grappled with: Energy insecurity is not episodic; it is systemic. For a country that imports over 85 per cent of its crude oil, geopolitical volatility is not an external risk. Every disruption in supply chains, every spike in oil prices and every escalation in regional conflict creates inflation, fiscal pressure, and current account stress. But such crises also present opportunities. India has the scale, the policy momentum, and the entrepreneurial capacity to convert this vulnerability into a decisive advantage.

The challenge must be used to redesign India's energy architecture. First, India must accelerate its renewable energy (RE) ambition and move from incrementalism to scale. India's existing target of 500 GW of RE by 2030 was bold when announced. Today, it's no longer sufficient. A revised target of 1,500 GW by 2030 is both necessary and achievable. This pertains to both climate commitments and energy sovereignty. In 2025, China added almost 1,600 GW in clean energy (solar and wind), whereas India added a mere 49 GW.

To enable this increased target, procurement mechanisms must be strengthened. Central agencies must aggregate and contract at least 200 GW annually, complemented by aggressive state-level procurement. Renewable purchase obligations and renewable consumption obligations must be expanded and strictly enforced.

Grid infrastructure must, therefore, be treated as a national priority. Renewables-rich states such as Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu require high-capacity transmission corridors that are seamlessly integrated with storage systems. RE management centres must be expanded and their capability to manage intermittency enhanced. Last year, over 50GW of energy capacity remained stranded due to a lack of evacuation and over 35GW is likely to be curtailed this year. Storage is equally critical. Battery energy storage systems and pumped hydro storage must be deployed in a mission mode. Every renewable tender going forward must mandate storage integration. Storage should be classified as a core RE asset and the GST on it should be brought down.

Second, India must rethink energy consumption at the household level. LPG has played a transformative role in improving health outcomes and reducing indoor pollution. But it is import-dependent. Electric induction cooking offers a pathway to shift household energy consumption towards clean power. This transition requires scale and strategy. Prices of induction cooktops can be reduced through demand aggregation, replicating the success of the UJALA programme. The database of Ujjwala beneficiaries provides a ready platform for targeted distribution.

Third, transport electrification should become a national economic strategy. India must announce a clear and time-bound roadmap: Full electrification of new two-wheelers and three-wheelers by 2030, buses in the near term, and cars and trucks by 2035. Electrification cannot succeed without fixing the battery ecosystem. The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for advanced chemistry cells has not succeeded and must be urgently restructured. Underperformance must be addressed, timelines reconsidered, and credible global and domestic players brought in. Charging infrastructure must be scaled across urban and highway networks. This requires coordination across central, state, and municipal levels, supported by clear standards and viable business models.

Fourth, nuclear energy must be scaled as a long-term backbone of India's energy mix. Renewables and storage will form the bulk of future capacity. But nuclear power provides the firm, non-intermittent supply that is essential for grid stability. India's ambition to reach 100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047 is strategic and necessary. Small modular reactors offer a scalable pathway. With the enabling policy now in existence, the priority must be to operationalise the reforms by starting bidding for projects and creating a predictable pipeline. Private-sector participation, global partnerships, and streamlined regulatory processes will be critical.

Fifth, India must build end-to-end capabilities in critical minerals. The challenge is not just access to raw materials, but also processing and refining. Today, global supply chains are heavily concentrated, creating strategic vulnerabilities. India must develop domestic processing capabilities at scale. This will require assured offtake mechanisms, price support frameworks, and long-term contracts that provide certainty to investors. Strategic partnerships with resource-rich countries must be deepened, not just for extraction but for integrated value chains. Equally important is human capital. Training programmes at leading institutions must create a pipeline of skilled professionals in mineral processing, battery chemistry, and advanced manufacturing.

Sixth, and this is where India's current discourse remains underdeveloped — the country must position itself as a clean energy manufacturing hub. Solar modules, batteries, electrolysers, grid technologies and green hydrogen represent the next wave of global manufacturing.

India must leverage its scale, policy incentives, and domestic demand to attract and build world-class manufacturing ecosystems. PLIs must be aligned across sectors, logistic costs reduced, and export competitiveness enhanced.

Seventh, financing the transition must become a core strategic priority. India must deepen its green finance ecosystem, including green bonds, blended finance structures, and sovereign-backed risk mitigation instruments. India's renewable sector has attracted private capital from across the world. This was feasible because of predictable policies and actions through the Solar Energy Corporation of India. Similar policy frameworks are necessary across sectors to enable the private sector to attract capital and technology. Domestic financial institutions must be incentivised to lend to clean energy projects. Multilateral development banks and global climate funds must be leveraged more effectively. Carbon markets can play a catalytic role if designed with integrity and scale.

Finally, execution must be anchored in institutional coordination and accountability. India has demonstrated its ability to deliver at scale, whether through digital public infrastructure, financial inclusion, or RE deployment. Energy transition now requires a similar whole-of-government approach. The turbulence in West Asia is a warning. But it is also a window. The choices made today will determine whether India remains vulnerable to external shocks or becomes a nation that shapes its energy destiny.

The author is chairman, Fairfax Centre for Free Enterprise. He is former CEO, NITI Aayog. Views expressed are personal

India's existing target of 500 GW of RE by 2030 was bold when announced. Today, it's no longer sufficient. A revised target of 1,500 GW by 2030 is both necessary and achievable

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia have highlighted India's structural energy vulnerability due to heavy import dependence.
- India imports over 85% of its crude oil, making it highly exposed to supply disruptions, price shocks, and inflationary pressures.
- The crisis underscores the need to redesign India's energy architecture towards resilience, sustainability, and self-reliance.

Key Points

- Renewable Energy ExpansionCurrent target: 500 GW by 2030; proposed scaling to ~1500 GW.
- India added ~49 GW clean energy recently vs China's massive expansion (~1600 GW).
- Grid & Storage Challenges~50 GW capacity stranded due to inadequate transmission.
- Need for battery storage + pumped hydro integration.
- Household Energy TransitionLPG improves health but increases import dependence.
- Shift toward electric cooking (induction-based) suggested.
- Transport ElectrificationTarget:
  - 2W & 3W → 100% electrification by 2030
  - Buses → near term
  - Cars & trucks → by 2035
- Issues with PLI scheme for batteries need restructuring.
- Nuclear EnergyTarget: 100 GW by 2047
- Role: firm, non-intermittent power for grid stability.
- Critical MineralsNeed domestic capability in processing & refining, not just extraction.
- Manufacturing Hub VisionFocus sectors: solar modules, batteries, hydrogen, electrolysers.
- Financing the TransitionInstruments: green bonds, blended finance, carbon markets.

Static Linkages

- Energy security: availability, affordability, accessibility
- National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)
- Paris Agreement commitments (NDCs)
- Electricity Act, 2003 – grid & transmission reforms
- UJALA Scheme (demand aggregation model)
- PM Ujjwala Yojana – LPG access
- PLI Scheme – manufacturing incentives
- Basics of nuclear energy: base-load power
- Balance of Payments – impact of oil imports

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Reduces import dependence
- Supports climate goals
- Boosts domestic manufacturing

Challenges

- High investment requirement
- Renewable intermittency
- Weak grid infrastructure
- Critical mineral dependence

Way Forward

- Scale renewable capacity with storage
- Strengthen grid infrastructure
- Promote EVs & electric cooking
- Reform PLI schemes
- Expand nuclear energy
- Secure critical minerals
- Develop green finance

Iran remains a fortress state, built to endure

JAPPANDEEP KOUR AND AMIT JULKA

IT HAS been four weeks, and already the heady rhetoric of regime change has sobered down to US President Donald Trump's claims of backchannel negotiations. Most attribute this to Iran's escalation dominance. While that is undoubtedly important, the key to understanding the state's resilience also lies in its political economy and social forces.

In *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci once compared the modern state to a system of fortifications where the coercive arm of the state was only the "outermost ditch", while the civil society (which produces consent for the state) was a system of earthworks inside protecting it. Simply put, the civil society makes the people "believe in the system", allowing the system to stay resilient during a crisis, making a direct attack (or "a war of manoeuvre") ineffective.

In Iran, this fortification can be imagined as a patchwork of interlocking institutions, allowing for flexibility and resilience. This is also the result of historical experience. The assassination of the Qajar monarch Naser al-Din in 1896, the forced exile of Reza Shah in 1941, and the CIA-MI6 coup against Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953 resulted in a system built to survive "decapitations". Post-1979, this was all the more important in the context of regional isolation and friction with the United States. The Islamic Republic thus became an amalgam of overlapping institutions that substituted one another in case of incapacitation. For instance, at the executive level, the temporal institution of the president was tied to the spiritual *rehbar* (leader). Similarly, the elected parliament (*majlis*) is supplemented by a guardian council that ensures compliance with Islamic principles. The regular military, *artesh*, was complemented by the establishment of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that guards the Islamic revolution. The reliance on a decentralised command-and-control structure allows Iran the flexibility to absorb the loss of senior command.

While these interlocking structures provide a formal and coercive stability, Islamic republicanism and social distribution gave the system legitimacy. Extensive welfare projects managed not just by traditional state ministries, but a network of non-state revolutionary foundations and committees, resulted in the cultivation of strong social constituencies such as war veterans and the rural poor. By the 1990s, the project witnessed sharp developmental gains, and Iran outperformed several middle-income states. For instance, female literacy between ages 15 and 24 reached 99 per cent in 2025.

The Iranian state's legitimacy also relies on ideology. Even before 1979, the discontent against the Shah was spread through clandestinely popular audio recordings of Khomeini. While a lot of this discontent acquired a reactionary form and targeted visible symbols of modernity (such as women's dresses), it also stemmed from the economic inequities of the Shah's rule. The revolutionary opposition also relied on framing the struggle against the Shah by utilising the traditional Shi'i theological metaphor of *mostazafin* (oppressed) vs the *mustakbirin* (oppressor). Islam was also presented as an alternative to capitalism and communism — avoiding the penury of the former and the atheism of the latter. This allowed the state's ideology to resonate with the rural masses.

Finally, the opposition forces struggle to assemble a counter-hegemonic bloc that can breach the fortress. The diaspora's hawkish attitudes limit its social appeal, while the left remains largely subdued. Meanwhile, the domestic reformist opposition has struggled to create an alliance with the street. However, after the Zan Zendegi Azadi movement and the economic crises, the street has managed to surprise, even pulling in the usually pliant Tehran Bazaar. But without organisation and leadership, this spontaneous momentum risks dissipation.

For Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu, the writing on the wall is clear. Conventional military superiority cannot affect political change if the balance of social forces is not in favour of a new political outcome. Empires spending billions of dollars on shiny but breakable new toys should take heed.

Kour is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for West Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Julka is assistant professor, Department of International Relations, Ashoka University

For Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu, the writing on the wall is clear. Conventional military superiority cannot affect political change if the balance of social forces is not in favour of a new political outcome

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Recent geopolitical tensions involving Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu vis-à-vis Iran have highlighted Iran's resilience despite external pressure.
- Initial claims of backchannel negotiations have weakened amid Iran's continued strategic posture.
- The discussion shifts from purely military analysis to understanding Iran's political economy, institutional structure, and social legitimacy.
- Theoretical lens drawn from Antonio Gramsci on state resilience and civil society.

Key Points

- Institutional ResilienceIran has a dual structure:
  - elected (President, Majlis) + unelected (Supreme Leader, Guardian Council).
  - Overlapping institutions ensure continuity even after leadership loss ("decapitation-proof system").
- Parallel military structure:
  - Artesh (regular army) + Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).
  - Decentralised GovernanceFlexible command-and-control structure enhances shock absorption capacity.
  - Power diffusion prevents collapse during crises.
  - Political Economy & WelfareExtensive welfare network through state + quasi-state foundations (bonyads).
  - Strong support base among rural poor, war veterans.
- Social indicators:
  - near universal female literacy (≈99% in youth).
  - Ideological LegitimacyIslamic republicanism blends religion + governance.
  - Narrative of mostazafin (oppressed) vs mustakbirin (oppressors).
  - Positioned as an alternative to both capitalism and communism.
  - Weak OppositionDiaspora lacks domestic legitimacy.
  - Left remains marginalised.
  - Reformists lack organisational strength.
  - Movements like "Zan, Zendegi, Azadi" show potential but lack leadership cohesion.

Static Linkages

- Concept of State and Civil Society – NCERT Political Theory.
- Separation of Powers & Checks and Balances – Indian Polity (Laxmikanth).
- Role of Ideology in State Formation – Modern World History.
- Welfare State Model & Redistribution – Indian Economy (Economic Survey).
- Internal Security & Non-state Actors – GS3 Security.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Institutional depth ensures continuity and stability.
- Strong ideological base generates mass legitimacy.
- Welfare outreach creates durable social support.
- Decentralisation enhances crisis resilience.

Negatives

- Democratic limitations due to unelected institutions.
- Economic strain from sanctions and isolation.
- Rising youth dissatisfaction and protests.
- Ideological rigidity may hinder reforms.

Challenges

- Balancing ideology with economic needs.
- Managing internal dissent.
- Ensuring leadership transition stability.
- Overcoming external isolation.

Way Forward

- Gradual political reforms with accountability.
- Focus on economic diversification and resilience.
- Strengthen state–society engagement mechanisms.
- Encourage inclusive governance and dialogue.
- External actors should adopt non-military, multi-dimensional engagement.

No peace plan will work without a ceasefire

HIS DEADLINE looming, US President Donald Trump has submitted a 15-point plan to end the war in West Asia, said to have been delivered to Iran via Pakistan. Not surprisingly, officials in Iran have rejected it, submitting a counter-proposal of their own. Yet the fact that both sides appear to have established a channel of communication, amid the five-day "pause", could be the starting point of a much-needed diplomatic process. That could be clutching at straws given Trump's bellicose "get serious" message to Iran Thursday and orders to deploy troops from the 82nd Airborne Division to the region. Trump insists he is engaging with "the right people" in Iran, while Iranian leaders say the US is "negotiating with itself", and it is still unclear who is calling the shots in Iran. Since his father's killing, Mojtaba Khamenei has been heard but not seen.

While the details of the plan are not yet public, its broad contours suggest a list of maximalist demands — particularly regarding Iran's ballistic missile arsenal and its nuclear weapons programme. More consequential, for now, is Trump's claim that his regime-change objective has been accomplished — this may not describe the reality on the ground, but it creates political space for a negotiated exit. The key to any diplomatic off-ramp, however, will be the Strait of Hormuz, where Iran's chokehold has strained global supply chains, driving up energy costs. Tehran's counter-proposal includes the demand for international recognition of Iran's "sovereign right to exercise authority over the Strait of Hormuz", while Trump demands that it be fully reopened. Resolving this impasse is essential. Without a consensus, there can be no durable framework for a long-term agreement.

What is required for talks to move forward is an immediate ceasefire. In this, a critical factor, and hurdle, is Israel. As the prospect of US-Iran engagement grows, Israel has intensified its strikes on Iran. It announced Thursday that it had killed the Iran Navy chief behind the Hormuz blockade and has escalated operations in southern Lebanon as part of its campaign against Hezbollah. In the past, Benjamin Netanyahu has sought to derail US-Iran diplomacy to further his own interests. For Washington, therefore, advancing a proposal for the endgame is not enough. It also has to convince Iran — and Israel, too — that the plan is not a smokescreen for the next phase of the military campaign. To expect Tehran to consider any peace plan as missiles rain down and its leaders are killed is to expect the near-impossible. A ceasefire, therefore, is the best next step but given how Trump is shooting his mouth off, trashing Iran and its leaders, that seems distant.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Donald Trump administration has opened limited backchannel talks with Iran via Pakistan amid rising military tensions.
- Iran has rejected the US proposal and offered a counter-plan, indicating a fragile diplomatic opening.
- The crisis centres around the Strait of Hormuz, where disruptions have affected global energy supply.
- Simultaneously, military escalation continues, including US troop deployment and Israeli strikes under Benjamin Netanyahu.
- Absence of ceasefire makes negotiations uncertain.

Key Points

- Strait of Hormuz:
  - Handles ~20% of global oil trade → critical for energy security.
  - Strategic chokepoint → disruption impacts global economy.
- US Position:
  - Limits on Iran's nuclear & missile programme.
  - Free navigation in Hormuz.
- Iran's Position:
  - Sovereign control over Hormuz.
  - Security guarantees (no regime change).
- Core Issue:
  - Conflict between freedom of navigation vs national sovereignty.

Static Linkages

- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea:
  - Defines transit passage in international straits.
- Balance of Power (IR theory).
- Energy Security (Economic Survey).
- Chokepoints in Geography (NCERT).

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Diplomatic channel exists → reduces war risk.
- Opportunity for negotiated settlement.

Negatives

- No ceasefire → low trust.
- Maximalist demands by both sides.
- Israel's actions may derail talks.

Key Challenge

- Reconciling:
  - Iran's sovereignty
  - Global need for free navigation

Way Forward

- Immediate ceasefire
- Third-party mediation (UN / neutral states)
- Phased negotiations (step-by-step concessions)
- Guarantee of navigation rights under UNCLOS
- De-escalation by all stakeholders

Court verdict is a nudge for responsible design

THE VERDICT delivered by a California court this week holding Meta and YouTube accountable in a social media addiction case could be a bellwether for the larger movement towards accountability for Big Tech. The 20-year-old plaintiff, who claimed that the platforms run by these companies led to anxiety and depression, was awarded millions of dollars in damages — Meta is to pay $4.2 million and YouTube $1.8 million. The verdict is being called technology's Big Tobacco moment. The analogy may be imperfect, but the underlying shift it points to is real: A diffuse, widely felt harm has finally been named and, importantly, attributed.

The idea that social media is engineered to be addictive has hovered at the level of common sense. The verdict lends greater weight to what insiders like former Google design ethicist Tristan Harris and Justin Rosenstein, creator of the Facebook "like" button, have long argued: Social media platforms are built to capture and hold attention through design choices that exploit human psychology. From the allure of "likes", described by Rosenstein as the "bright dings of pseudo pleasure", to the pull-to-refresh feature which has been likened to slot machines, from Snapstreaks to the subtle coercion of WhatsApp read receipts, these choices have shaped behaviour, recalibrated social expectations, and blurred the boundary between choice and compulsion.

The challenge now is to work out the most sustainable ways for minimising harms. Governments across the world, from Australia to France, and within India, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, are experimenting with bans and age restrictions, driven by legitimate concerns about children, whose neuroplasticity makes them especially vulnerable and susceptible. But in a world where education, work, and social life are deeply entangled with digital platforms, prohibition cannot be the full or only solution. The harder path lies in shared responsibility. Public pushback in recent years has already prompted some rethink in Big Tech, leading to measures like the removal of beauty and "plastic surgery" filters on Instagram and the implementation of age verification on multiple platforms. But it must go further, factoring in care, not compulsion, at the level of conception and design. Children, too, must be equipped with the cognitive and emotional tools to navigate the attention economy. It may not be possible to push the social media genie back into the bottle. It can, however, be made less predatory.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- A California court awarded damages to a 20-year-old plaintiff against Meta Platforms ($4.2 million) and YouTube ($1.8 million) for mental health harms linked to social media addiction.
- The verdict is being termed a "Big Tobacco moment" for Big Tech—signifying legal recognition of diffuse societal harms.
- Growing global concern over algorithm-driven addictive design (likes, infinite scroll, streaks, etc.) and its impact on youth mental health.
- Countries like Australia, France and Indian states (Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh) are exploring restrictions and safeguards.

Key Points

- Social media platforms use behavioral design techniques (dopamine loops, variable rewards) to maximize engagement.
- Insider critiques (e.g., Tristan Harris) highlight attention economy exploitation.
- Evidence links excessive social media use with anxiety, depression, and reduced attention span (WHO, UNICEF reports).
- Legal accountability for tech companies is evolving—similar to liability regimes for tobacco, pharma, etc.
- Policy responses include:
  - Age restrictions & parental controls
  - Algorithmic transparency demands
  - Data protection and child safety laws
- In India:
  - IT Rules 2021 mandate grievance redressal and due diligence
  - Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 includes child data safeguards

Static Linkages

- Fundamental Rights: Article 21 (Right to Life – includes mental well-being)
- Directive Principles: Protection of children and youth (Art. 39(f))
- Behavioral Economics: Nudging, bounded rationality (NCERT Economics)
- Role of technology in society (NCERT Sociology)
- Consumer Protection Act, 2019 – unfair trade practices
- IT Act, 2000 – intermediary liability

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Establishes legal accountability of Big Tech
- Recognizes mental health as a legitimate harm
- Encourages ethical design and platform responsibility
- Empowers consumers/users

Concerns / Challenges

- Difficulty in proving causal link between platform use and harm
- Risk of over-regulation impacting innovation and free speech
- Jurisdictional issues in regulating global tech firms
- Digital platforms are now integral to education/work—complete bans impractical
- Algorithmic opacity limits enforcement

Stakeholder Perspectives

- Governments: Need regulation but avoid stifling growth
- Companies: Argue user choice and self-regulation
- Parents/Children: Demand safety and accountability
- Civil society: Push for digital rights and transparency

Way Forward

- Move from prohibition → responsible design regulation
- Mandate algorithmic audits & transparency reports
- Strengthen child-centric digital laws (age-appropriate design codes)
- Promote digital literacy & emotional resilience (NCERT curriculum integration)
- Independent regulatory authority for digital platforms (like TRAI model)
- Encourage ethical tech frameworks (NITI Aayog AI ethics guidelines)
- Global cooperation for cross-border tech governance