

DAILY NEWSP APER ANALYSIS

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**CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

Iranians warn U.S. against ground invasion

‘Waiting for Americans to start their ground attack to set them on fire,’ says Iran Speaker

Pakistan says it will soon host U.S.-Iran talks after regional Ministers meet in Islamabad

Islamabad talks are a cover for U.S. to deploy more troops to West Asia, the Speaker says

Associated Press
ISLAMABAD

Iranian forces were “waiting for the arrival of American troops on the ground to set them on fire and punish their regional partners forever”, Iranian state media reported. Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf as saying on Sunday while warning the United States against a ground invasion.

The remarks came as Pakistan announced on Sunday that it will soon host talks between the United States and Iran.

“Pakistan is very happy that both Iran and the U.S. have expressed their confidence in Pakistan’s facilitation” of the talks, which will happen in the “coming days,” Foreign Minister Ismail Dar said in a televised speech after top diplomats from regional countries

met in Islamabad. There was no immediate word from the United States or Iran.

Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Egypt were in Islamabad on Sunday for talks with-out U.S. or Israeli participation in a push to broker an end to the month-long war.

The Iranian Speaker dismissed Sunday’s talks as a cover while the U.S. dispatches additional troops to West Asia.

The visiting Ministers have endorsed Pakistan’s peace efforts, Mr. Dhar said without specifying whether the proposed talks would be direct or indirect. The Ministers are expected to meet again on Monday.

Ships cross Hormuz
Iran, which eased some restrictions on ships passing through the Strait of



Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye meet in Islamabad on Sunday. REUTERS

Hormuz, agreed late on Saturday to allow 20 more Pakistani-flagged vessels to transit the critical passage-way, Pakistani officials said, adding to the select few it has let through as Iran works to choke but not cut off the strait

entirely.

Egypt’s Badr Abdelatty, who was part of the talks with Türkiye’s Hakan Fidan, Saudi Arabia’s Prince Faisal Bin Farhan, and Pakistan’s Ismail Dar, said the meetings were aimed at opening a “direct dia-

logue” between the United States and Iran, which have largely communicated through mediators during the war.

Yet there were few signs of progress as Israel and the United States kept up strikes on Iran, and Tehran

Challenging times, says PM on West Asia crisis

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, in his monthly Mann Ki Baat address, noted that the situation in West Asia had created “challenging times” and called for those “politicising” the issue to refrain from doing so. He added that he was “deeply grateful” to the Gulf countries for providing assistance to more than one crore Indians there. **» PAGE 4**

responded by firing missiles and drones across the region.

Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps warned in a statement that it would consider Israeli universities and branches of U.S. universities in the

region “legitimate targets” unless offered safety assurances for Iranian universities, state media reported after Israeli strikes hit several universities, including ones claimed to have been used by the Islamic Republic for nuclear research and development.

Israel announced waves of incoming strikes from Iran on Sunday and explosions could be heard throughout Tehran.

IRGC also said that they launched missile and drone strikes on aluminium plants in Bahrain and the UAE over the weekend, targeting what they described as industries linked to the U.S. military.

Iranian authorities say more than 1,900 people have been killed in the Islamic Republic, while 19 have been reported dead in Israel.

(With AFP inputs)

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Iran warned the United States against a possible ground invasion, indicating escalation risks.
- Pakistan announced its role in facilitating talks between Iran and the U.S.
- Foreign Ministers from Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Egypt met in Islamabad to push for de-escalation.
- Ongoing conflict between Israel and Iran continues with missile, drone, and air strikes.
- Iran partially eased restrictions on shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, allowing select vessels.
- Iran’s IRGC expanded targets to economic and educational institutions linked to adversaries.

Key Points

- Pakistan positioning itself as a mediator reflects its strategic diplomatic outreach.
- Strait of Hormuz remains partially open, indicating calibrated escalation rather than total blockade.
- Conflict has widened geographically (Bahrain, UAE targeted).
- Civilian and infrastructure targeting (universities, industries) indicates hybrid warfare.
- Casualties: ~1900 in Iran, ~19 in Israel (as reported).
- No formal confirmation yet from U.S. or Iran regarding proposed talks.

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz handles ~20% of global oil trade → critical maritime chokepoint.
- Principle of Freedom of Navigation under international law (UNCLOS).
- Proxy warfare and deterrence theory in international relations.

- Role of third-party mediation in conflict resolution (Track 1 diplomacy).
- West Asia as a geopolitically sensitive region for energy security.
- Diaspora protection as a key element of foreign policy.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Regional diplomacy led by Pakistan and West Asian states may reduce direct confrontation.
- Partial opening of Hormuz avoids global economic shock.
- Multilateral engagement reflects preference for dialogue over escalation.

Concerns

- Lack of trust between Iran and U.S. may derail talks.
- Continued military escalation undermines diplomatic efforts.
- Expansion of targets to civilian infrastructure violates international humanitarian norms.
- Risk of regional spillover affecting global energy markets and shipping lanes.

Stakeholder Perspectives

- Iran: Defensive posture, deterrence signaling.
- U.S. & Israel: Security-driven offensive strategy.
- Pakistan: Diplomatic relevance and regional leadership.
- Gulf Countries: Stability and energy security concerns.
- India: Energy imports, diaspora safety, strategic neutrality.

Way Forward

- Promote sustained Track-1 and Track-2 diplomacy.
- Ensure safety of maritime routes via international cooperation.
- Strengthen UN-led mediation mechanisms.
- Avoid targeting civilian infrastructure; adhere to Geneva Conventions.
- India should maintain strategic autonomy while safeguarding energy and diaspora interests.

Challenging times, says PM on West Asia crisis

Modi warns against politicising the issue, says the region is a major centre of India's energy needs, and due to the ongoing war, a 'crisis' regarding petrol and diesel is emerging around the world

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday noted that the situation in West Asia had created "challenging times" and called for those "politicising" the issue to refrain from doing so. He cautioned Indians against believing rumours related to the crisis.

Speaking during his monthly Mann Ki Baat address, the Prime Minister said that following the COVID-19 pandemic, it was expected that the world would move forward on a path of renewed progress.

"However, situations of war and conflict have continuously kept arising in different parts of the world," he said.

"At present, a fierce war has been going on in our neighbourhood for a month. Millions of our family members, near and dear ones, live in these countries, especially working in the Gulf countries."

Deeply grateful
"I am deeply grateful to the Gulf countries for providing all kinds of assistance to more than one crore Indians there," he added.

Mr. Modi noted that the

I would once again urge all my countrymen that we must unitedly overcome this challenge. Those who are politicising even this issue should refrain from doing so. This is a matter concerning the interests of 140 crore countrymen; there is no place for self-serving politics.

NARENDRA MODI
Prime Minister



Budget Quest. "It aims to connect the youth across the country with the Budget process and policymaking," the Prime Minister said. "Nearly 12 lakh youth from across the country participated in the quiz."

Sports achievements

The Prime Minister also devoted a section of his address to India's sporting achievements in the recent past.

"When India achieved a historic victory in the T20 World Cup, a wave of joy swept across the country," he said. "We are all very proud of our team's thumping success."

"Late last month, a thrilling match was witnessed in Hubli, Karnataka. By winning this match, the Jammu and Kashmir cricket team secured for themselves the Ranji Trophy," he said. He remarked that this success for Jammu and Kashmir will encourage many young people to take up sports, adding that the people of J&K have a "tremendous passion" for sports. "I am glad that it is now becoming a hub for major sporting events," Mr. Modi said. "I hope this winning streak of J&K sports persons continues in the future."

continuous information provided by the government and take action based only on that."

Key initiatives

During his address, the Prime Minister also took note of various initiatives aimed at nation-building. One such initiative was the Gyan Bharatam Survey aimed at collecting information about manuscripts across the country.

"If you have a manuscript or information about it, do share its image on the Gyan Bharatam App," Mr. Modi said, adding, "Information related to each entry is being verified before it is recorded. I am glad that thousands of manuscripts have been shared so far."

Another initiative he highlighted was MY Bharat

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Narendra Modi, during Mann Ki Baat, flagged:
 - Ongoing conflict in West Asia creating global instability.
 - Concerns over Indian diaspora (~1 crore in Gulf countries).
 - Emerging energy crisis (petrol & diesel prices).
- Key appeal:
 - Avoid rumours and misinformation.
 - Do not politicise national interest issues.
 - Maintain unity and vigilance.

Key Facts

- India imports ~85% of crude oil (Economic Survey).
- West Asia contributes ~60%+ of India's oil imports.
- Strait of Hormuz:
 - Connects Persian Gulf → Gulf of Oman.
 - Handles ~20% of global oil trade.
- Indian diaspora in Gulf:
 - ~8–9 million people.
- India:
 - World's largest remittance recipient (~\$125 billion, World Bank).

Importance for India

(a) Energy Security

- Heavy dependence on West Asia for crude oil.
- Price shocks → inflation + CAD pressure.

(b) Indian Diaspora

- Major source of remittances.
- Requires protection during crises (evacuation readiness).

(c) Geopolitical Interests

- Region critical for:
 - Trade routes
 - Strategic partnerships
- Policy guided by strategic autonomy.

Static Linkages

- Strategic autonomy in foreign policy.
- Current Account Deficit (CAD) influenced by oil imports.
- Supply chain disruptions due to conflicts.
- Diaspora diplomacy as soft power.
- Internal security risks from misinformation.

Issues & Challenges

- Energy Vulnerability:
 - High dependence on imports.
- Inflationary Pressure:
 - Fuel price rise → economy-wide impact.
- Diaspora Safety:
 - Risk in conflict zones.
- Misinformation Spread:
 - Social media amplifies rumours.
- Geopolitical Balancing:
 - Maintaining neutrality amid global tensions.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Focus on national unity during crisis.
- Recognition of diaspora importance.
- Timely warning against fake news.

Concerns

- Over-reliance on official information may limit information diversity.
- Structural issue of energy dependence remains unresolved.
- Misinformation control mechanisms still evolving.

Way Forward

- Energy Diversification:
 - Renewables, green hydrogen, strategic reserves.
- Diaspora Protection:
 - Strong evacuation & tracking systems.
- Information Management:
 - Fact-checking + digital literacy.
- Diplomatic Balance:
 - Engage all sides while protecting national interest.
- Economic Measures:
 - Cushion fuel shocks via fiscal/monetary tools.

A missed opportunity to guarantee minimum wages

There has been a lively debate in the last few months about the respective merits of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, or VB-G RAM G Act for short. Absent from this debate, however, is a critical issue that haunts both Acts: wage rates.



Jean Drèze

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government notified ₹100 per day in most States, with a top-up in States where the minimum wage was above that norm. This was sold as a pro-worker move, in pursuance of a promise made by the Congress Party in the run-up to the 2009 general election. Over time, however, this move enabled the central government to moderate the growth of MGNREGA wages. In fact, the central government from MGNREGA wages in real terms from then on. To this day, wages are raised State-wise every year to the extent of price increases (based on the Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labourers), but not more.

Real-wage freeze consequences

This real-wage freeze rapidly led to two serious issues. First, MGNREGA wages started lagging behind minimum wages in many States, as minimum wages rose in real terms but MGNREGA wages did not. By 2025-26, the MGNREGA wage rate was lower – often much lower – than the minimum wage of agricultural labourers in most States, according to a recent analysis by Lavanya Tamang. This defeats an important purpose of MGNREGA: sustaining minimum wages. It also raises the question whether it is at all legal for the government to pay MGNREGA workers less than the minimum wage (this matter was taken up in the Supreme Court of India but was not clearly settled).

The other issue is that MGNREGA wages also started lagging behind market wages. Between 2009 and 2014, real wages were rising quite rapidly in rural India, partly because MGNREGA was tightening the labour market. By 2014, the ratio of MGNREGA wage rate to agricultural wage was around 60% for men and 75% for women at the all-India level, according to Labour Bureau data. The gap maintained itself from then on, as rural wage rates stagnated in real terms.

The real gap is actually much bigger than it looks. The reason is that market wages are not only higher than MGNREGA wages but also (generally) paid on time – often the same day, MGNREGA wages, by contrast, are often paid after long and uncertain delays. The central government keeps denying this, but the evidence is clear, notably from recent studies by the IIT Tech group. In fact, not only are there delays, sometimes, MGNREGA wages are not paid at all, for example due to technical failures of the Aadhaar-based Payment System or National Mobile Monitoring System. The result is a tremendous “discouragement effect” – many rural workers have lost interest in MGNREGA.

The absence of any marked decline in MGNREGA employment generation levels may seem to contradict this. A recent analysis of Periodic Labour Force Survey data, however, suggests that MGNREGA employment levels are in fact much lower today than they were in the early

years of all-India implementation, contrary to official statistics. The growing gap between official statistics and actual employment seems to reflect a major increase in leakages in the same period. The discouragement effect and the resurgence of corruption are integrally related. When workers lose interest, there is no vigilance. Worse, workers may be tempted to cooperate with corrupt elements instead of working by the rules.

Continuing policy failure

Unfortunately, the VB-G RAM G Act is all set to perpetuate this crisis. For one thing, it does not contain any new, constructive provisions that might help to ensure the timely payment of wages or to curb corruption. For another, it continues to empower the central government to determine wage rates (under Section 10), even as the rationale for this has vanished.

Remember, the argument for an early switch from Section 6(2) to Section 6(1) under MGNREGA was that, when wages are fully paid by the central government, they should not be determined by the State government. Under the VB-G RAM G Act, however, wage costs are shared 60:40 between Centre and States. There was every reason to drop MGNREGA's Section 6(1) from the VB-G RAM G Act and revert to the principle of Section 6(2): guaranteed payment of minimum wages. Instead, the central government did the opposite: it dropped Section 6(2) and retained Section 6(1), giving itself perpetual powers to set the wage rates of VB-G RAM G workers.

There is another issue here. Section 6(1) of MGNREGA began with a non-obstante clause (“Notwithstanding anything contained in the Minimum Wages Act, 1948”) that acted as a kind of legal fig leaf for overriding minimum wages. Oddly, there is no equivalent of this clause in the VB-G RAM G Act. But then, how can the central government justify paying anything less than minimum wages?

A way forward would be for the central government to notify wage rates equal to or higher than minimum wages in all States (under MGNREGA or the VB-G RAM G Act, as the case may be). This would feed many birds with one crumb. It would put wage payments on a sound legal footing. It would lead to a much-needed increase in real wages. And, it would also produce a simple rule for updating wage rates over time.

More likely, the central government will prolong the real-wage freeze and use it as a means of ensuring that employment generation under the VB-G RAM G Act declines over time. If so, the wage freeze should be challenged in court. Indeed, with the non-obstante clause removed, the payment of anything less than minimum wages is patently illegal.

- Payment Delays: Persistent delays due to Aadhaar-based Payment System (ABPS) and National Mobile Monitoring System (NMMS).
- Leads to discouragement effect and declining interest among workers.
- Leakages and Corruption: Reduced worker participation weakens accountability.
- Increase in ghost beneficiaries and fund leakages.
- Issues with VB-G RAM G Act: Retains central control over wages (Section 10).
- Removes provision ensuring minimum wages.
- No strong reforms for timely payments or transparency.

Static Linkages

- Directive Principles: Right to livelihood and living wage
- Concept of minimum wages vs real wages
- Role of fiscal federalism in welfare schemes
- Labour welfare and social security measures
- Inflation indexing using CPI-AL
- Legal doctrine: non-obstante clause and its implications

Critical Analysis

Positives

- MGNREGA initially boosted rural wages and bargaining power.
- Provided employment security during distress (e.g., COVID-19).
- Inflation-linked indexation ensures nominal wage protection.

Negatives

- Real wage stagnation reduces scheme attractiveness.
- Violation of minimum wage principle raises legal concerns.
- Persistent payment delays undermine trust.
- Technological systems (ABPS, NMMS) introduce exclusion errors.
- Centralized wage setting weakens federal balance.

Stakeholder Concerns

- Workers: Low wages + delayed payments → reduced participation
- States: Limited autonomy in wage determination
- Centre: Fiscal burden concerns
- Civil society: Concerns about transparency and legality

Way Forward

- Ensure MGNREGA wages ≥ State minimum wages across all states.
- Introduce automatic real wage revision mechanism (beyond inflation indexing).
- Strengthen timely payment guarantees with legal penalties for delays.
- Reform digital systems to reduce exclusion and technical failures.
- Enhance social audits and community participation.
- Rebalance Centre-State roles to improve cooperative federalism.
- Use DBT with safeguards to ensure transparency without exclusion.

The VB-G RAM G Act is a missed opportunity to correct serious anomalies in the determination of wage rates for MGNREGA workers

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- A recent debate has emerged comparing the performance of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the proposed Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act.
- The debate has largely ignored a critical issue: wage rates and their adequacy.
- Evidence suggests that MGNREGA wages have stagnated in real terms, lagging behind both minimum wages and market wages.
- The proposed VB-G RAM G Act appears to continue similar structural issues, especially regarding wage determination and payment mechanisms.

Key Points

- Legal Framework of Wages (MGNREGA): Section 6(1): Central government notifies wages.
- Section 6(2): State minimum wages apply until central notification.
- Shift in Wage Policy (Post-2009): Central government fixed wages (~₹100/day initially).
- Subsequent increases linked only to CPI-AL (inflation), not real wage growth.
- Wage Gap Issues: MGNREGA wages are lower than state minimum wages in most states (2025-26).
- Also lag behind market wages, reducing worker participation.

A Bill that secures IPS officers' role in deputation

On March 25, 2026, the central government introduced the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026 in the Rajya Sabha to regulate the general rules governing the recruitment and conditions of service of 'Group A General Duty Officers' (GAGDO) and other officers in the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs). This Bill provides that 50% of Inspector General posts, a minimum of 67% of Additional Director General posts (ADG), and all Special Director General (SDG) and Director General posts shall be filled by deputation from the Indian Police Service.



R.K. Vij
A former Indian Police Service (IPS) officer

Applies across CAPFs
By implication, deputation to the rank of Deputy Inspector General and below, shall continue to be regulated by the prevailing rules. The Bill also saves any financial benefits granted to the GAGDO (Group A officer of the rank of Assistant Commandant and above) issued before. This Act shall apply to the five CAPFs – Central Reserve Police Force, Border Security Force, Central Industrial Security Force, Indo Tibetan Border Police and Sashastra Seema Bal. While the Bill aims to institutionalise the historical contributions and representation of the IPS in the CAPFs, it is seen by some as an instrument to undo the directions issued by the Supreme Court of India in *Sanjay Prakash and Others vs Union of India and Others* (May 2025).

The Court ruled mainly on two issues; to complete the pending cadre review and undertake the review of service rules in a given time-period; and to progressively reduce the number of posts earmarked for deputation in the CAPFs up to the level of Senior Administrative Grade (SAG) i.e., Inspector General rank, within a period of two years. It is thus clear that the recognition of the CAPFs as Organised Group 'A' Services (OGAS) was subject of the provision of

The Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026 strengthens service rules and clarifies IPS deputation policy

deputation of IPS officers to various CAPFs. The Court noted that there are various issues connected with the deployment of CAPFs, including coordination with the State Governments and the State police forces. The appointment of IPS officers in each CAPF is vital to maintain the character of each CAPF. This is a policy decision manifest through the service rules of the CAPFs. The question of who shall head these forces was never contentious. It was not even a case that the petitioners' service conditions had worsened since they joined the service.

A 'unifying link'
Most of the senior operational posts in States are held by ADG or SDG rank officers. Therefore, the appointment of IPS officers to the CAPFs at senior ranks is essential for smooth relations with the State forces. Their selection process and training, along with field experience, give them a broader vision and an edge in leading forces whose main aim is to assist or work in tandem with State forces. Those who use the term 'parachuting IPS officers into CAPFs' seem unaware of Sardar Patel's vision, which envisaged the IPS as a unifying link between the Union and the States. The IPS officers have lived up to his dreams for decades, upholding the constitutional mandate.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, in January 2026, modified the empanelment guidelines of IPS officers at the Centre and made a minimum two-year stint at the Centre mandatory for empanelment at the rank of Inspector General. Therefore, the appointment of IPS officers in the Superintendent of Police (SP)/Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) ranks in the CAPFs will further cement their camaraderie with the cadre officers.

As far as reducing the posts of deputation is concerned, the Court seems to have ruled on the

policy matter which exclusively falls within the domain of the legislature and executive. While the Court clearly stated that the matter of taking IPS officers on deputation is a policy matter and the central government in its wisdom had taken a view that the presence of IPS officers in each CAPFs is vital, it erred in directing the central government to reduce the posts of deputation.

Judiciary's role

The duty of the court is to interpret law. Courts may fill gaps in certain spheres, but they are not to plunge into policy making by adding something. The court is not expected to sit as an appellate authority on an option it feels wiser to. The Court has previously held that 'the wisdom and advisability of the policies are ordinarily not amenable to judicial review unless the policies are contrary to statutory or constitutional provisions or arbitrary or irrational or an abuse of power'.

The Court, in *Gazula Dasaratha Rama Rao vs The State Of Andhra Pradesh & Others* (1960), held that 'the service provisions under ... the Constitution do not enshrine any fundamental right of citizens; they relate to recruitment condition and tenure of service of persons, ... appointed to a Civil Service or to posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or any State'. Rightly so. The Court, in *Indian Ex Servicemen Movement and Ors. Vs. Union of India and Ors.*, held that it did not find any constitutional infirmity in the 'One Rank One Pension' principle.

The service conditions of CAPFs can be enhanced through regular intake and timely cadre reviews. The appointment of IPS officers on deputation to the CAPFs, being a policy matter beyond the scope of adjudication, is rightly being codified, leaving no room for divergent interpretations in the future.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Central Government introduced the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026 in the Rajya Sabha to regulate recruitment and service conditions of Group A General Duty Officers (GAGDO) in CAPFs.
- The Bill mandates deputation of Indian Police Service (IPS) officers to senior ranks in CAPFs:
 - 50% of Inspector General (IG) posts
 - Minimum 67% of Additional Director General (ADG) posts
 - 100% of Special DG and DG posts
- Applies to five CAPFs: CRPF, BSF, CISF, ITBP, and SSB.
- The move is seen as counter to the directions of the Supreme Court of India in *Sanjay Prakash case* (2025), which recommended reducing deputation posts up to IG level.
- Debate revolves around balance between cadre officers of CAPFs and IPS deputation, and judicial vs executive domain in policymaking.

Key Points

- Institutionalisation of IPS dominance in senior CAPF leadership.
- Recognition of CAPFs as Organised Group 'A' Services (OGAS).
- Retains existing rules for lower-rank deputation (DIG and below).
- Protects previously granted financial benefits to CAPF officers.
- Government justification:
 - Ensures coordination with State police forces.

- IPS officers bring broader administrative and operational experience.
- Supreme Court observations:
 - Called for cadre review and reduction in deputation posts.
 - Highlighted need for career progression of CAPF cadre officers.
- Ministry of Home Affairs reform:
 - Mandatory 2-year central deputation for IPS empanelment at IG rank.

Static Linkages

- All India Services under Article 312 of the Constitution.
- Role of IPS as an अखिल भारतीय सेवा ensuring Centre-State administrative linkage.
- Doctrine of Separation of Powers.
- Judicial Review limitations in policy matters.
- Service conditions governed under Articles 309–311.
- Internal security architecture of India.
- Federal structure and cooperative federalism.

Critical Analysis

Pros

- Strengthens coordination with State Police.
- Ensures experienced leadership in CAPFs.
- Promotes uniformity in internal security strategy.

Cons

- Hampers promotion prospects of CAPF cadre officers.
- Affects morale within CAPFs.
- Possible dilution of Supreme Court directions.

Challenges

- Balancing cadre vs deputation interests.
- Maintaining morale and efficiency.
- Defining judiciary-executive boundaries.

Way Forward

- Rationalise deputation quota with periodic review.
- Ensure time-bound promotions for CAPF cadre.
- Strengthen joint training (IPS + CAPFs).
- Improve transparency in empanelment system.

Neighbours first

India must invite Nepal's new Prime Minister, Balen Shah, to revive ties

In an exchange of early messages, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Nepal's newly-sworn-in Prime Minister Balendra "Balen" Shah said they look forward to "working closely" to take forward bilateral ties. Delhi and Kathmandu are prepared to begin a new chapter in relations, united by familial bonds, a shared culture, open borders, and intertwined politics. Landlocked Nepal has depended on trade and transit through India, with India's plans for an energy grid in the region an important channel for Nepal's hydropower exports and revenues. Like many former leaders of Nepal, Mr. Shah studied in India. Familiarity aside, it would be a mistake to assume that his ascension will chart a well-worn and predictable course between the two countries. At 35, he is Nepal's first Madhesi leader, and upturns the old dominance of the Brahmin-Chhetri Pahadi elite. New Delhi must have a greater understanding of the priorities of this new Gen-Z movement that brought down the K.P. Sharma Oli government in 2025. This is a new leadership that has not inherited the old foreign policy understandings of the past generations of leaders that came through the panchayati movement, Congress and Communist parties, or the Maoist movement that overthrew the monarchy. In that sense, the Shah government's foreign policy, including its ties with China and the U.S., as well as the overarching relationship with India, is yet to be formalised. In the past decade, India has increased its development assistance to Nepal, but it also strained its ties over the constitution, the long blockade on border trade, and territorial issues. As Mayor of Kathmandu, Mr. Shah was known for his overt nationalism, and rejection of the "hegemony" of India and other powers, while his use of a map of "Greater Nepal" had been read with some concern in New Delhi.

The Modi government should tread lightly, and positively, as the Shah government finds its feet, but offer India's full support in dealing with Nepal's immediate challenges. Among those are the impacts of the war in West Asia where Nepal will need help with fuel and fertilizer imports. Approximately 14% of Nepal's population (about 3.5 million) work abroad, and the country is dependent on remittances and tourism revenues. New Delhi could also reconsider requests from previous Nepali governments to allow overflight for new Nepali airports, reduce restrictions on purchasing Nepali power produced with third-country assistance and to update the bilateral friendship treaty. Differences delayed New Delhi's invitation in 2024 to Mr. Oli, upon his election – he eventually visited Beijing first. It is time to quickly invite Mr. Shah to visit Delhi at the earliest, and for Delhi and Kathmandu to move forward, putting "Neighbours first" in South Asia.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Narendra Modi and Balendra Shah exchanged initial messages signalling intent to strengthen India–Nepal ties.
- Nepal has witnessed a generational political shift, with a young, non-traditional leadership emerging after political changes in 2025.
- India and Nepal share deep cultural, economic, and political linkages, including open borders and people-to-people ties.
- Relations have faced strain in recent years due to issues like constitutional disagreements (2015), border blockade, and territorial disputes.
- Nepal's economy remains dependent on remittances (~14% population abroad), tourism, and hydropower exports, with India as a key partner.

Key Points

- India–Nepal ties are rooted in:
 - Open border system allowing free movement of people.
 - Shared civilizational, cultural, and familial bonds.
- Nepal's strategic importance:
 - Landlocked country dependent on India for trade and transit.
 - Potential hydropower hub linked to India's regional energy grid plans.

- Political shift in Nepal:
 - Rise of a Gen-Z leadership with different foreign policy outlook.
 - First Madhesi-origin Prime Minister, breaking traditional elite dominance.
- Emerging concerns:
 - Assertion of nationalism in Nepal (e.g., "Greater Nepal" discourse).
 - Possible recalibration of Nepal's ties with China and the U.S.
- Key pending bilateral issues:
 - Revision of India–Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950).
 - Market access for Nepal's electricity exports.
 - Overflight rights for new Nepali airports.
- External challenges:
 - Impact of West Asia crisis on Nepal's fuel and fertilizer imports.
 - Economic vulnerabilities due to dependence on remittances.

Static Linkages

- India's Neighbourhood Policy and regional diplomacy principles (India Year Book, MEA)
- Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1950 – provisions on trade, movement, and security
- Federalism and identity politics in South Asia (NCERT Polity & Sociology themes)
- Hydropower potential in Himalayan rivers (NCERT Geography – Water Resources)
- Remittances and migration trends (Economic Survey, World Bank data)
- Strategic importance of buffer states in geopolitics

Critical Analysis

Opportunities

- Strengthening energy cooperation through hydropower trade.
- Leveraging cultural diplomacy and people-to-people ties.
- Resetting ties with a new political leadership in Nepal.

Challenges

- Rising nationalism and anti-India sentiment in Nepal.
- China's increasing influence via infrastructure and BRI projects.
- Legacy issues like border disputes (Kalapani, Lipulekh).
- Economic asymmetry leading to perception of Indian dominance.

Stakeholder Perspectives

- Nepal: Seeks strategic autonomy and diversified partnerships.
- India: Aims to maintain regional stability and influence.
- China: Interested in expanding strategic footprint in Himalayas.

Concerns

- Delay in diplomatic outreach may push Nepal closer to China.
- Overdependence of Nepal on remittances → economic vulnerability.

Way Forward

- Proactive high-level diplomatic engagement, including early visits.
- Revisit and modernize the 1950 Treaty to address Nepal's concerns.
- Facilitate hydropower trade and grid connectivity.
- Ease restrictions on Nepal's aviation and energy exports.
- Promote sub-regional cooperation (BBIN framework).
- Adopt a sensitive and non-hegemonic approach respecting Nepal's sovereignty.
- Enhance development partnership transparency and delivery efficiency.

On a wing

Subsidies will not create demand for air travel to small towns

In a bid to revive the regional aviation sector, the Union Cabinet has signed off on a 'Modified UDAN' scheme with a sixfold higher outlay. The scheme had first been launched to expand aviation to interior areas, using scheduled commuter airlines. Even then, industry analysts and experts had complained that UDAN did not make a viable business case for small regional airlines due to a lack of supporting infrastructure, low or unpredictable passenger demand, insufficient coverage of operating costs, and lack of awareness. In Modified UDAN, the subsidy period for tier-II and tier-III routes has been increased from three years to five years, an extension at least one of the small carriers had sought under UDAN before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The exchequer will also fund the subsidies directly rather than having airlines levy an additional charge from passengers, with the government setting aside ₹10,043 crore over the next decade to this end. The government will also spend ₹12,159 crore to redevelop a hundred unused airstrips, ₹3,661 crore to build 200 helipads in remote areas, and purchase aircraft and helicopters for state carriers to boost last-mile connectivity to better match the mode of transport to actual demand and geography. The scheme will also pay for ongoing costs such as staffing and maintenance of low-traffic airports.

Regional aviation in India is structurally fragile and unlikely to become widely self-sustaining due to the unyieldingly high cost per passenger, price sensitivity, competition from rail and road transport, and operational inefficiencies. UDAN did not address them adequately and, sadly, Modified UDAN carries that failing over. The foremost one is weak underlying demand, with UDAN often picking routes with insufficient economic activity even as leisure and occasional travel could not sustain regular flights. Extending the subsidies, even if they are eased from the third year onwards, could keep routes alive for longer but will not of itself create demand. In this sense, the government's reluctance to revisit how it identifies and nurtures routes, and how different transport modes might substitute for air travel in low-density regions, seems inexplicable. The emphasis on last-mile connectivity and better planning also appears only partially incorporated as the details the Civil Aviation Ministry shared did not mention ground transport links or integrated scheduling, among others. Whether the decision to sustain connectivity using sustained government support, rather than cultivate a market that can stand on its own, will lead to lasting changes depends on whether route selection and integration with broader transport and economic networks improve in practice.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Union Cabinet has approved a Modified UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) scheme to revive regional aviation.
- The original UDAN scheme was launched in 2016 under the National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP), 2016 to enhance regional air connectivity.
- Persistent issues such as low passenger demand, high operational costs, and poor infrastructure limited its success.
- The modified scheme significantly increases financial outlay and expands infrastructure development to boost last-mile connectivity.

Key Points

- Financial Outlay ₹10,043 crore allocated over 10 years for subsidies (Viability Gap Funding - VGF).
- Subsidy burden shifted fully to the government (earlier partly funded through passenger levy).
- Infrastructure Push ₹12,159 crore for redevelopment of 100 unused/underutilized airstrips.

- ₹3,661 crore for construction of 200 helipads in remote areas.
- Operational Changes Subsidy period for Tier-II and Tier-III routes extended from 3 years to 5 years.
- Government support for operational costs like staffing and maintenance of low-traffic airports.
- Provision to purchase aircraft and helicopters for state carriers.
- Objective Enhance regional connectivity and last-mile access, especially in remote and hilly regions.
- Align transport modes (aircraft/heli) with geographical needs.

Static Linkages

- Air transport as part of infrastructure sector contributing to economic growth and regional development.
- Concept of Viability Gap Funding (VGF) for infrastructure projects (Public-Private Partnership model).
- Role of connectivity in balanced regional development (as per Economic Survey).
- Transport geography – suitability of different transport modes based on terrain and demand.
- Subsidy economics – issues of market distortion and fiscal burden.
- Federal governance – Centre-State coordination in infrastructure development.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Improves connectivity in remote and hilly regions.
- Promotes inclusive and balanced regional development.
- Boosts tourism, trade, emergency services.

Concerns

- Low demand viability on many routes.
- High cost per passenger.
- Competition from rail/road transport.
- Rising fiscal burden due to subsidies.
- Weak multi-modal integration.

Way Forward

- Demand-based route planning.
- Integrate with road & rail networks.
- Promote regional economic hubs.
- Use cost-efficient aircraft.
- Regular performance review of routes.

'New normal (in India-Canada ties) does not erase what has happened'

Divya A
New Delhi, March 29

EXPRESS
interview



SANJAY VERMA
FORMER INDIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER
TO CANADA

HIS BELONGINGS packed in cartons at his Delhi residence, ready to be shipped to his hometown Patna, former Indian High Commissioner to Canada Sanjay Verma recalls another shift that took place in the twilight of his 37 years in foreign service — one that was abrupt and “tense”.

That was in October 2024, when Verma was declared persona non grata, along with five other Indian officials, by the Justin Trudeau government in Canada over the Hardeep Singh Nijjar assassination case — India had denied any involvement in the killing. Today, Verma says he is happy that ties have mended between the two countries, and a “new normal” is being worked out. Edited excerpts from an exclusive interview:

Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney visited India this month. There has been a turnaround in India-Canada ties. You were in Ottawa when ties were frozen, what do you think necessitated this (turnaround)?

Whatever was happening in Canada when I was there was politically motivated. And the political motivation could linger long, or could be cut

short depending on the person in the chair. So, that is what has happened (with PM Mark Carney coming in). Whenever there is a change, there is a window of opportunity. And that window was quickly claimed through the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Canada. PM Carney is more of a global citizen, having served as governor of the British central bank. He has seen the world from a very different lens, which has a bit of geopolitics, but a lot of pragmatism.

Earlier, everything was being put in one basket, which was highly coloured by the views expressed by Khalistani extremists and terrorists there. Now, there are two containers. In one container, those areas

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Diplomatic ties between India and Canada witnessed a severe downturn following allegations by Canadian PM Justin Trudeau in 2023 regarding India's alleged involvement in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar.
- India strongly denied the allegations and termed them “politically motivated.”
- Several Indian diplomats, including Sanjay Verma, were declared persona non grata.
- Recent developments, including leadership change in Canada under Mark Carney and diplomatic engagement with Narendra Modi, indicate a gradual normalization of relations.
- Canadian investigative agencies (RCMP) recently indicated lack of evidence linking India directly to the Nijjar case.

Key Points

- Diplomatic Crisis Trigger: Allegations of “transnational repression” by Canada without publicly substantiated evidence.
- Persona Non Grata: Rare diplomatic step under Vienna Convention; expulsion of diplomats.
- Khalistani Extremism Issue:
 - Historical roots linked to events like the Air India Flight 182 bombing.
 - Concerns of extremist networks operating within diaspora communities.

- Geopolitical Shift:
 - Canada seeking diversification amid overdependence on the US.
 - India emerging as a key strategic and economic partner.
- Diaspora Dynamics: Large Sikh population in Canada; majority peaceful but small radical fringe influencing politics.
- Parallel Developments: US-based case involving Gurpatwant Singh Pannun remains legally distinct.
- Current Phase: Transition from confrontation to “re-normalisation” rather than complete reset.

Static Linkages

- Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961):
 - Article 9 allows declaring diplomats persona non grata.
- Sovereignty & Non-Intervention Principle (UN Charter).
- Diaspora & Foreign Policy: Role of overseas communities in shaping bilateral relations.
- Internal Security:
 - Challenges of separatism and transnational terrorism.
- India's Foreign Policy Doctrine:
 - Strategic autonomy
 - Neighborhood and extended neighborhood diplomacy
- Evidence & Rule of Law: Criminal justice principle—burden of proof lies on accuser.

Critical Analysis

- Pros:
 - Re-normalisation improves strategic and economic ties
 - Reinforces rule-based order (evidence-based approach)
- Cons:
 - Politicisation of intelligence
 - Diaspora extremism influencing bilateral ties
 - Trust deficit between nations

Way Forward

- Strengthen counter-terror cooperation
- Ensure evidence-based diplomatic engagement
- Engage diaspora to isolate extremist elements
- Resume trade negotiations (CEPA)
- Institutional dialogue mechanisms

We need a green exit from the urea trap



CHANDRA BHUSHAN

THE WEST Asia conflict has thrown a spotlight on India's deep energy insecurity. What is less discussed is how this vulnerability affects our food security. Since the Green Revolution, India has relied on urea to supply the nitrogen essential for higher crop yields. Urea accounts for 56 per cent of all fertilisers consumed and nearly 80 per cent of all nitrogenous fertilisers. Over 80 per cent of domestic urea is produced using imported natural gas, and more than a fifth of the total consumption is imported. In effect, nearly 90 per cent of the urea consumed in India is import-dependent.

The fiscal burden tells its own story. The urea subsidy has ballooned from less than Rs 500 crore in 1980-81 to Rs 1.65 lakh crore in 2022-23. Enormous public resources are poured into sustaining a system built on insecurity. The good news is that the technology and government programmes needed to build alternatives already exist. What is missing is a mission to bring them together.

Urea production involves two key processes: Producing ammonia from hydrogen and nitrogen, and then reacting it with CO₂. Indian plants derive hydrogen and CO₂ from natural gas, while nitrogen is drawn from the atmosphere. Urea produced through this process is called grey urea. But hydrogen can also be produced from water through electrolysis. In the 1970s, the Fertiliser Corporation of India's Nangal plant used electrolysis to produce hydrogen until power shortages in the Bhakra grid forced a switch to hydrocarbons. Carbon capture and utilisation (CCU), using absorption technologies, too, is already widely used in the urea sector to recover CO₂ from flue gas. So, we already have the building technologies — hydrogen from electrolysis, carbon dioxide from carbon capture, and nitrogen from the atmosphere — to produce urea using electricity alone. Power that electricity with renewables and you get green urea.

The obvious question is cost. A study of all 36 urea plants in India by my colleagues and me shows that green urea could become the most cost-effective option for a new urea plant by 2028. By 2030, the levelised cost is projected to be 20 per cent lower than that of grey urea; by 2050, this advantage widens to nearly 100 per cent. For the sector, the aver-

age levelised cost of green urea between 2025 and 2050 works out to about \$475 per tonne, compared with \$540 for grey urea. Today, grey urea in global markets is touching \$600 per tonne. In an era of uncertain geopolitics, economics has tilted in favour of green.

India has programmes to power this transition; they need to be redirected. The National Green Hydrogen Mission focuses on exporting green ammonia and using it in non-urea fertilisers and other sectors. The focus must shift towards green urea. The Union budget earmarked Rs 20,000 crore over five years for carbon capture, utilisation and storage. The programme should prioritise the supply of CO₂ to urea plants. If we bring these programmes together and provide them with strategic clarity, we can transition the urea sector to green.

We must also optimise urea consumption, because urea is significantly overused in the country, polluting land, water and climate. To achieve this, the government should launch a Green Urea Mission that does three things: Transition urea manufacturing from natural gas to green hydrogen, optimise consumption, and rebalance the fertiliser mix. If, by 2040, we move 90 per cent of urea production to green hydrogen, increase the area under non-chemical farming to 30 per cent, improve nitrogen use efficiency in agriculture by 30 per cent, and reduce the proportion of urea in nitrogenous fertilisers by 30 per cent, the rewards will be immense. Urea imports would be eliminated, subsidies would fall by 65 per cent and GHG emissions from the sector would decline by over 60 per cent. Water and air pollution would be significantly reduced. The cumulative value of these benefits could be above Rs 1 trillion over the next 25 years.

This will not happen without structural reform. The urea sector is heavily regulated, with low profitability and almost no incentive to innovate. The most viable path forward is phased decontrol — market competition, as in case of other fertilisers. A Green Urea Mission offers a pathway from dependence to self-reliance. The economics are compelling, the technology is ready, and the environmental imperative is urgent.

The writer is CEO, Forest

We must optimise urea consumption, because urea is significantly overused, polluting land, water and climate. To achieve this, the government should launch a Green Urea Mission

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The ongoing West Asia conflict has heightened global energy insecurity, directly impacting countries like India that depend on imported fossil fuels.
- India's fertiliser sector—especially urea—is heavily dependent on imported natural gas, linking energy security with food security.
- Around 90% of urea consumption is import-dependent (directly or indirectly), exposing agriculture to geopolitical shocks.
- Rising fertiliser subsidies (₹1.65 lakh crore in 2022-23) reflect fiscal stress and structural inefficiencies.
- Policy discussions are now focusing on transitioning towards green urea using renewable energy and green hydrogen.

Key Points

- Urea dominance in agriculture Accounts for 56% of total fertiliser use.
- Makes up nearly 80% of nitrogenous fertilisers.
- Import dependence Over 80% of domestic production depends on imported natural gas.
- More than 20% of urea is directly imported.
- Production process Conventional (grey urea): Natural gas → Hydrogen + Nitrogen + CO₂ → Urea.

- Green urea: Hydrogen via electrolysis (renewables) + Nitrogen (air) + CO₂ (carbon capture).
- Economic trends Global grey urea price ~ \$600/tonne.
- Green urea projected to be:
 - 20% cheaper by 2030
 - Nearly 100% cheaper by 2050
- Environmental concerns Overuse leads to:
 - Soil degradation
 - Water pollution (nitrate leaching)
 - Greenhouse gas emissions
- Government initiatives National Green Hydrogen Mission
- Budget allocation for Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) (~₹20,000 crore)

Static Linkages

- Green Revolution → Input-intensive agriculture and fertiliser dependency
- Haber-Bosch Process → Industrial ammonia production
- Nitrogen Cycle → Role of nitrogen in plant growth
- Subsidy → Fiscal policy tool and distortions
- Renewable Energy → Solar and wind power potential in India
- Sustainable Agriculture → Organic farming, precision farming
- Climate Change → GHG emissions from agriculture sector
- Environmental Pollution → Eutrophication due to fertiliser runoff

Critical Analysis

Pros

- Reduces import dependence
- Cuts subsidy burden
- Supports climate commitments
- Promotes self-reliance

Cons

- High initial investment
- Infrastructure constraints
- Policy/regulatory rigidity
- Farmer affordability concerns

Way Forward

- Launch Green Urea Mission
- Phase-wise urea decontrol
- Promote nano urea & precision farming
- Improve Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE)
- Expand renewable energy for fertilisers
- Encourage balanced fertiliser use (N:P:K)
- Support natural/organic farming

A quiet diplomacy, based in national interest



KAUSAR
JAHAN

ASWEST Asia slides once again into uncertainty, the pressure on major powers to “take sides” has grown. Escalating tensions have revived familiar anxieties over energy security, maritime stability, and regional destabilisation. In this charged atmosphere, India’s restraint has attracted criticism from those who mistake silence for indecision. That reading is flawed.

India’s approach to West Asia is rooted in calibrated multi-alignment. Unlike many regional and extra-regional actors, India has sustained parallel and substantive relationships with Iran, Israel, the Gulf monarchies, and the US. This is a conscious policy choice shaped by hard interests and regional realities. Crises such as the present one only underline why this approach is not just defensible, but necessary.

The stakes for India are high. Nearly 88 per cent of its crude oil imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint that becomes vulnerable every time regional tensions spike. At the same time, close to 9 million Indian citizens live and work across the Gulf, contributing over \$50 billion annually in remittances. Any public posturing that alienates one side risks endangering energy supplies, trade routes, and the safety of the diaspora. Strategic neutrality is thus not moral evasion — it is national interest.

Critics often overlook the fact that restraint has been matched by concrete action. Despite the suspension of rupee-denominated oil trade with Iran due to international sanctions, India secured a humanitarian window to import 500,000 tonnes of discounted Iranian liquefied petroleum gas, preventing fertiliser shortages at home. Simultaneously, India has deepened its energy diversification strategy through nearly \$10 billion in green hydrogen investments from the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Operational readiness has reinforced India’s posture. The safe passage of Indian-flagged vessels through the Strait of Hormuz during heightened tensions underscores India’s focus on maritime security and contingency planning. These actions are far more consequential than rhetorical alignment. Protecting sea lanes and commercial assets is where diplomacy meets state capacity. India’s caution is also shaped by the complexity of its partnerships. Relations with Iran are vital for regional connectivity and access; ties with Israel underpin defence and technology co-operation; engagement with Gulf states is central to energy security and diaspora welfare; and strategic convergence with the United States remains crucial in the broader Indo-Pacific context. Publicly siding with one actor risks weakening ties with another.

Moreover, India’s role in multilateral platforms such as BRICS further limits the utility of unilateral rhetoric. Acting as a responsible stakeholder requires sensitivity to collective dynamics, not megaphone diplomacy.

The West Asia crisis is a reminder that restraint, when backed by preparedness and purpose, is a strength. India’s diplomacy may not be loud, but it is calculated, resilient, and anchored in national interest. That is what effective foreign policy should be.

The writer is chairperson, Delhi State Hujj Committee, and member of the BJP.

Any public posturing that alienates one side risks endangering energy supplies, trade routes, and the safety of the diaspora. Strategic neutrality is thus not moral evasion — it is national interest

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Escalation of tensions in West Asia has renewed concerns over energy security, maritime chokepoints, and regional instability.
- India’s restrained diplomatic stance has been criticized, but reflects a policy of calibrated multi-alignment.
- India maintains parallel relations with key stakeholders:
 - Iran (energy, connectivity)
 - Israel (defence, technology)
 - Gulf nations like Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (energy, diaspora)
 - United States (strategic partnership)
- The crisis highlights India’s dependence on the Strait of Hormuz for oil imports and the vulnerability of its diaspora in the Gulf.

Key Points

- Energy Dependence ~88% of India’s crude oil imports transit through the Strait of Hormuz.
- India is the 3rd largest oil importer globally (IEA/Economic Survey).
- Diaspora Factor ~9 million Indians reside in Gulf countries.
- Annual remittances exceed \$100 billion (World Bank), with Gulf contributing a major share.
- Strategic Autonomy India follows multi-alignment, not bloc politics.

- Avoids public alignment to preserve ties across rival regional actors.
- Economic & Energy Diversification Investments worth ~\$10 billion in green hydrogen from UAE and Saudi Arabia.
- Continued diversification of energy sources (Russia, renewables, strategic reserves).
- Maritime Security Ensuring safe passage of Indian vessels in the Persian Gulf region.
- Naval preparedness aligns with SAGAR doctrine (Security and Growth for All in the Region).
- Engagement with Iran Despite sanctions, India secured humanitarian imports (e.g., LPG).
- Strategic importance of Chabahar Port for connectivity to Central Asia.
- Multilateral Constraints India’s role in BRICS requires balancing diverse geopolitical positions.

Static Linkages

- India’s energy security framework (Economic Survey, NITI Aayog Energy Strategy).
- Diaspora policy – Pravasi Bharatiya initiatives (Ministry of External Affairs).
- Strategic autonomy – evolution from Non-Alignment (NCERT Modern India).
- Maritime geography – importance of chokepoints like Hormuz (NCERT Geography).
- Indian Ocean policy – SAGAR doctrine and naval strategy.
- West Asia policy – “Link West Policy” (MEA).

Critical Analysis

Pros

- Protects energy + diaspora interests
- Maintains ties with all stakeholders
- Enhances strategic flexibility

Cons

- Perceived lack of strong stance
- Limited global leadership role
- Continued energy dependence risk

Way Forward

- Diversify energy (renewables, hydrogen)
- Strengthen naval security in IOR
- Expand strategic reserves
- Deepen connectivity (Chabahar, corridors)
- Balanced but proactive diplomacy

G7 meet underlines fractures in the West

WHEN THE foreign ministers of the Group of Seven met at a mediaeval monastery outside Paris last week, their agenda was inevitably dominated by the US-Israeli war against Iran and its cascading global economic consequences. The ministers called for an immediate halt to attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, emphasised the protection of diplomatic missions and foreign nationals, and warned that continued escalation could destabilise the wider Middle East. They called for coordinated humanitarian assistance for affected populations and underlined the need for a return to diplomatic channels. The G7 ministers also warned that disruption to shipping through the waterways posed a serious threat to the global economy, given the large share of the world's oil and gas that transits it, and indicated readiness to coordinate maritime security efforts to ensure freedom of navigation.

The barebones statement did little to conceal, however, the deepening divisions between Washington and its NATO partners. Trump has been relentless in publicly castigating European allies for their reluctance to back the US against Iran. The Europeans, for their part, feel angry at being excluded from decisions over a war at their doorstep; some have declared it illegal and want no part in it. Secretary of State Marco Rubio reminded European partners that Washington has borne the major share of Ukraine's defence over four years — a war, he pointedly noted, not of America's making. He also sought to reassure them that the war against Iran would be over within weeks and that the US would prevail. For five decades, the G7 has been the sheet anchor of Western leadership of the international order. It has weathered political storms before. This time, though, the differences look deep and structural rather than superficial and tactical.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar attended the Paris meeting as a special invitee, alongside counterparts from Brazil, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Ukraine. He used the occasion to engage collectively and bilaterally with G7 ministers and to underscore the importance of coordinated action in ending the war. Jaishankar and his French counterpart agreed to maintain close coordination on securing the Strait of Hormuz. The two ministers also confirmed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation in the G7 Summit in June, underlining India's contribution to the group's work on macroeconomic imbalances and international partnerships. India's presence at the Paris meeting was a demonstration of the country's growing global salience — and a reminder of the greater responsibilities that come with it. As the fracture within the West deepens, India's contribution to stabilising the Gulf situation becomes not merely needed but also urgent.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Foreign Ministers of the Group of Seven met in Paris amid escalating tensions due to the US-Israel conflict with Iran.
- The meeting focused on humanitarian concerns, protection of civilians, and risks to global economic stability.
- Concerns raised over disruption in critical maritime routes like the Strait of Hormuz affecting global energy supplies.
- Visible divisions emerged between the US and its European allies over legality and participation in the conflict.
- India, represented by S. Jaishankar, attended as a special invitee, reflecting India's growing global role.

Key Points

- G7 called for:
 - Immediate halt to attacks on civilians and infrastructure.
 - Protection of diplomatic missions (Vienna Convention obligations).
 - Coordinated humanitarian assistance.
 - Restoration of diplomatic engagement.
- Maritime Security:
 - Emphasis on ensuring freedom of navigation in key chokepoints.
 - Threat to ~20% of global oil trade passing through Hormuz (Energy security concern – Economic Survey insights).
- Strategic Rift:

- US pushing for strong alignment against Iran.
- European nations cautious; some termed the war “illegal”.
- Indicates weakening cohesion of Western alliance (post-Cold War order).
- India's Role:
 - Balancing ties with US, Iran, Gulf countries (multi-alignment).
 - Engagement with France on maritime security cooperation.
 - Participation in upcoming G7 Summit (global governance role).

Static Linkages

- India's energy imports:
 - ~85% crude oil import dependence (Ministry of Petroleum data).
- Importance of West Asia:
 - Major source of remittances (Indian diaspora ~9 million in Gulf).
- Freedom of Navigation:
 - Principle under UNCLOS.
- Diplomatic protection:
 - Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations ensures safety of missions.
- Balance of Power theory (Class 12 NCERT – IR basics).
- Strategic choke points:
 - Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, Malacca Strait.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- G7 recognition of humanitarian concerns strengthens global norms.
- Maritime coordination helps protect global trade flows.
- India's inclusion reflects rise as a key stabilising power.

Concerns

- Fragmentation within the West weakens global institutional leadership.
- Risk of escalation into wider regional conflict.
- Disruption in oil supply may trigger inflation and fiscal stress in India.
- Lack of UN-led resolution reduces legitimacy of actions.

Stakeholder Perspectives

- US: Strategic dominance and deterrence against Iran.
- Europe: Preference for diplomacy, legal legitimacy.
- India: Stability + energy security + diaspora safety.
- Gulf countries: Concerned about regional spillover.

Way Forward

- Strengthen diplomatic channels through multilateral forums (UN, G20).
- India to deepen strategic autonomy and multi-alignment policy.
- Enhance Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) capacity.
- Diversify energy imports (Russia, renewables, green hydrogen).
- Expand naval cooperation for maritime security in IOR and beyond.
- Promote conflict resolution through dialogue (Track-II diplomacy).

Crisis must spur efficient use of resources

IN THE 1970s, when the first oil shocks emanated from West Asia, Indian farmers were just starting to use urea and diammonium phosphate, while households overwhelmingly relied on firewood and dung cakes for cooking, and a minuscule minority wore polyester and nylon fabrics. That isn't so today, with over 70 million tonnes of annual chemical fertiliser consumption, 330 million active domestic LPG connections, almost 60 per cent of India's textile production based on manmade fibres, and polymers becoming ubiquitous in everything from plastic bags, bottles and buckets to pipes and cables. It is not surprising that the current US-Israel-versus-Iran war is having a far more widespread impact on India's economy. Everyone — consumers, manufacturers, eatery operators, farmers and airline companies — is feeling the heat.

This war could be to India what the 1970s energy crises were to the Western economies. That decade of high inflation and low growth ("stagflation") upended the prevailing Keynesian economic model of fiscal policy-led demand management, paving the way for Reaganomics in the US and Thatcherism in the UK. A similar wake-up call awaits India, at least with regard to dependence on imported energy, especially fossil fuels. Indian farmers are unlikely to go back to ploughing their fields with bullocks or replace factory-made chemical fertilisers with composted cow manure. Nor is it desirable to return to the era of smoky kitchens and cooking with dried dung, tree branches or coal. But it certainly cannot be business as usual. The 1970s shock impelled Brazil to launch an ambitious ethanol-based transport fuels programme. Efficient use of resources that India lacks, along with paying their full scarcity value and searching for viable alternatives, has to be mainstreamed into government policy and consumer behaviour. It means not subsidising fertilisers or limiting it to a certain number of bags per farmer, à la LPG cylinders.

Efficient imported energy use apart, India must step on the gas with ethanol-blending in petrol and incentivising the production of electrified flex-fuel vehicles. This should be accompanied by a scaling-up of initiatives such as bio-additives in chemical fertilisers (to enhance nutrient uptake and improve soil health), dimethyl ether from biomass-derived methanol (as a substitute for LPG), bio-CNG from sugarcane pressmud and other agricultural as well as municipal organic waste, and potash from distillery spent wash. The chances of success are higher when the opportunity cost of imported fuels — that extends to national security and strategic vulnerabilities — becomes obvious. For India, this is an unprecedented crisis and a moment of opportunity.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Ongoing US-Israel-Iran conflict has triggered global energy and supply-chain disruptions.
- India's economic exposure has deepened compared to the 1970s due to:
 - Heavy dependence on imported fossil fuels (~85% crude oil import dependence – Economic Survey).
 - Rising consumption of chemical fertilisers (~70+ million tonnes annually).
 - Expansion of LPG usage (~33 crore connections under Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana).
 - Increased reliance on petrochemical-based products (plastics, synthetic fibres).
- The crisis highlights vulnerabilities in energy security, food security, and industrial production.
- The situation is comparable to the 1970s Oil Crisis that caused stagflation in Western economies.

Key Points

- Energy Dependence India imports ~85% of crude oil and ~50% of natural gas (Economic Survey).
- West Asia supplies ~60% of India's crude imports (Ministry of Petroleum).
- Fertiliser Vulnerability India imports key fertiliser inputs (phosphatic, potassic fertilisers).

- Urea accounts for ~56% of fertiliser consumption.
- Inflationary Pressures Higher crude prices → increased transport, aviation, food, and manufacturing costs.
- Risk of cost-push inflation and possible stagflation.
- Policy Challenges Subsidy burden (fertiliser + LPG) strains fiscal balance.
- Energy transition remains incomplete despite renewable expansion.
- Emerging Alternatives Ethanol blending target: 20% by 2025 (Ministry of Petroleum).
- Bio-CNG, green hydrogen, dimethyl ether (DME), and bio-fertilisers gaining policy traction.

Static Linkages

- India's import dependence in energy sector (Economic Survey, Class XII NCERT – Indian Economic Development)
- Concept of stagflation (high inflation + low growth) (Macroeconomics NCERT)
- Fertiliser subsidy and nutrient imbalance (Economic Survey, Soil Health Card Scheme)
- Biofuels policy (National Policy on Biofuels, 2018)
- Energy security as part of national security (India Year Book)
- Environmental impact of fossil fuels (Class XII Geography NCERT – Resources and Development)

Critical Analysis

Positives / Opportunities

- Crisis can accelerate energy diversification (renewables, biofuels).
- Push for Atmanirbhar Bharat in fertilisers and energy.
- Encourages efficient resource pricing and reduction of wasteful subsidies.
- Boost to innovation: flex-fuel vehicles, green hydrogen, bio-CNG.

Concerns / Challenges

- High fiscal burden due to subsidies (fertiliser + LPG).
- Inflation impacts poor households and farmers disproportionately.
- Transition costs: infrastructure, technology, behavioural change.
- Risk of food insecurity due to fertiliser price shocks.
- Strategic vulnerability due to geopolitical dependence on West Asia.

Stakeholder Perspective

- Farmers: Dependence on subsidised fertilisers; price rise hurts yields.
- Consumers: Rising LPG and fuel costs.
- Industry: Increased input costs reduce competitiveness.
- Government: Balancing fiscal prudence vs welfare commitments.

Way Forward

- Gradual rationalisation of fertiliser and LPG subsidies with DBT targeting.
- Accelerate 20% ethanol blending and promote flex-fuel vehicles.
- Scale up biofertilisers and nano-urea (IFFCO initiative).
- Promote green hydrogen mission for long-term energy security.
- Diversify crude import sources (Russia, Africa, Latin America).
- Invest in strategic petroleum reserves.
- Encourage circular economy: waste-to-energy
- Strengthen renewable energy capacity (