DAILY NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

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CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH

Huge turnout in Assam, Puducherry and Kerala

- Incumbents in all the States express confidence that increased voter turnout indicates a victory
- Election is key to Kerala's future and the CPI(M) will secure a bigger mandate, says the Kerala CM
- Assam CM hails the 'historic' turnout, with many booths crossing 95%, as a vote to protect identity

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

There was record poll participation in the Assembly elections on Thursday, with the highest-ever voter turnout of 85.91% in Assam and 89.87% in Puducherry, crossing the previous highs of 84.67% for the State in 2016, and 86.19% for the Union Territory in 2011.

Kerala also saw a high voter turnout of 78.27%, with data still coming in and poll officials saying the final figure could even cross the record of 80.54% registered in 1987.

There were 300 Assembly constituencies at stake in Thursday's polling, including 296 seats in Assam, Kerala, and Puducherry with a total electorate of over 5.31 crore who have all been vetted through the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and the special revision in Assam.

Bypolls were also held to four seats in Karnataka, Nagaland, and Tripura. Counting of votes for all seats will take place on May 4. The bypolls held in Karnataka's Bagalkot and Davanagere-South saw a voter turnout of 68.67% and 68.43% respectively. In Nagaland's Koridang seat, 82.21% of the electorate cast their ballot, while 80.04% of electors voted in Tripura's Dharmanagar constituency.

Confident sides

Describing the election as crucial for Kerala's future, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan expressed confidence of victory by a bigger margin for the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led alliance.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, seeking a third straight term for the BJP-led NDA, hailed the "historic" turnout, as voter participation crossed 95% in many polling booths.

In Puducherry, where polling remained peaceful barring minor incidents, Chief Minister N. Rangasamy said the high voter turnout reflected a strong resolve to re-elect his government, while the Congress president of the U.T., V. Vaithilingam, said the turnout was because of a strong mood for change.

After casting his vote, the Kerala Chief Minister asserted that the State's people favour development and believe that only the LDF can take the State forward with commitment. In Kerala, polling took place in 140 Assembly seats with the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) looking for a hat-trick in the State.

Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan, on the other hand, reiterated that the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) will come to power with more than 100 seats, while BJP State president Rajeev Chandrasekhar said that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is confident of winning a majority on its own.

In Assam, the bulk of the State's 2.5 crore voters have sealed the fate of 722 candidates, including 59 women. Officials said voting was largely peaceful, despite reports of violence in a few constituencies, including Khowang and Tamulpur, and allegations of proxy voting at a booth in the Guwahati Central constituency.

"Assam has risen above language and caste. Our people have voted with one clear resolve – to protect our land, our identity, and our culture from illegal infiltration and demographic aggression," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

State Congress president Gaurav Gogoi thanked the people of the State for turning out in unprecedented numbers to vote for change. "It is now the responsibility of the Election Commission to ensure the security of the EVMs and to conduct an accurate counting of votes on May 4," he said.

According to an EC statement, over 2.5 lakh polling staff reached their polling stations on Wednesday night itself. Mock polls were completed before 7 a.m. in the presence of over 1.8 lakh polling agents appointed by 1,899 candidates and polling began peacefully at all 63,084 stations simultaneously.

Many new voter-friendly initiatives were introduced, including easily identifiable colour photos of candidates on EVM ballot papers, mobile deposit facilities, newly designed voter information slips for easy readability, and a limit of 1,200 voters per station.

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Making it count

Kerala, Assam, and Puducherry marked higher turnouts than in previous polls; this comes against the backdrop of the SIR (special revision in Assam) leading to deletion of names from voter rolls

Wedding vote: A newly wed couple after voting at a polling booth in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

Kerala (140 seats)	
Voter turnout	78.27%
2021 turnout	74.06%
Puducherry (30 seats)	
Voter turnout	89.87%
2021 turnout	83.28%
Assam (126 seats)	
Voter turnout	85.91%
2021 turnout	82.04%

PROVISIONAL TURNOUT AS OF FRIDAY 12:30 A.M.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Assembly elections in Assam, Kerala, and Puducherry recorded historic voter turnout:
  - Assam – 85.91% (highest ever)
  - Puducherry – 89.87% (highest ever)
  - Kerala – 78.27% (close to 1987 record)
- Elections conducted by the Election Commission of India across 296 Assembly constituencies.
- Total electorate: 5.31+ crore voters.
- Bypolls held in Karnataka, Nagaland, and Tripura.
- Counting of votes scheduled for May 4.

Key Points

- Massive electoral exercise:
  - ~63,000 polling stations
  - ~2.5 lakh polling personnel deployed
- Electoral Roll Reforms:
  - Special Intensive Revision (SIR) undertaken for accuracy.
- Voter-Friendly Initiatives:
  - Candidate photographs on EVM ballot units
  - Improved voter information slips
  - Mobile deposit facilities
  - Cap of 1,200 voters per polling station
- Participation Trends:
  - Several polling booths in Assam reported >95% turnout
- Concerns Reported:
  - Instances of violence
  - Allegations of proxy voting
  - Concerns regarding EVM security

Static Linkages

- Article 324 → Powers of Election Commission
- Article 326 → Universal Adult Franchise
- Representation of the People Act, 1950 → Electoral rolls
- Representation of the People Act, 1951 → Conduct of elections
- Free and Fair Elections → Basic Structure Doctrine (SC judgments)
- EVM & VVPAT → Ensuring transparency and verifiability
- Model Code of Conduct (MCC) → Ethical electoral conduct

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reflects deepening democratic participation
- Indicates greater political awareness and mobilisation
- Demonstrates administrative efficiency of election machinery
- Strengthens legitimacy of elected governments

Challenges

- Electoral malpractices (proxy voting, violence)
- Trust deficit in EVMs among sections of stakeholders
- Regional disparities in turnout (urban vs rural)
- Influence of identity politics and polarization

Stakeholder Perspective

- Voters → Increased awareness but concerns about fairness
- Political parties → Competing narratives on mandate
- Election Commission → Balancing scale, neutrality, credibility

Way Forward

- Strengthen VVPAT-based audit mechanisms
- Enhance transparency in EVM functioning
- Promote urban voter participation campaigns
- Use technology (AI, webcasting) to curb malpractice
- Introduce remote voting options for migrant workers
- Ensure strict enforcement of MCC and electoral laws

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

Iran truce teeters over Lebanon and Strait of Hormuz

Associated Press
Agence France-Presse
DUBAI/ISLAMABAD

The tentative ceasefire in the Iran war staggered on Thursday under the weight of Israel's intense bombardment of Lebanon, Tehran's continued chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, and uncertainty over whether negotiators can find common ground on a range of other differences.

Hours after the ceasefire was announced on Wednesday, Israel pounded Beirut with air strikes, resulting in the deadliest day in the country since the war began on February 28.

Lebanon's Health Ministry said on Thursday that the latest Israeli strikes killed more than 300 people and wounded at least 1,150 across the country.

Israel's strikes "signal deception and non-compliance" and render negotiations "meaningless", Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said. "Our hands remain on the trigger," he added.

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said Lebanon was a key part of the two-week ceasefire. "Lebanon and the entire Resistance Axis as Iran's allies, form an inseparable part of the ceasefire," Mr. Ghalibaf said in a post on X, adding that "ceasefire violations carry explicit costs and STRONG responses".

Iran and the U.S. – which both declared victory in the wake of the ceasefire announcement – appeared to try to pressure each other on Thursday even as both countries were due to meet in Pakistan for talks this weekend.

News agencies in Iran suggested forces have mined the strait while the U.S. President warned that Iran would be hit even harder than before if it did not fulfil the agreement.

The chief of Iran's nuclear agency said that protecting Tehran's right to enrich uranium is "necessary" for progress with the U.S. Mohammad Eslami, who leads the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, made the remarks on Thursday to presspersons during commemorations for the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran. "It is a part of the necessary [things] that nobody speaks about," Mr. Eslami said, referring to the U.S. refusal to acknowledge enrichment as one part of Iran's 10-point plan.

'NUCLEAR CONCERN'
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KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- A tentative ceasefire between Iran and Israel was announced after escalating hostilities.
- Soon after, Israel conducted heavy airstrikes on Beirut in Lebanon, causing over 300 deaths and more than 1,100 injuries.
- Iran accused Israel of violating the ceasefire and warned of strong retaliation.
- Iran indicated possible disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, a key global oil transit route.
- The U.S. and Iran are expected to hold talks amid tensions over Iran's nuclear enrichment program.

Key Points

- Ceasefire Fragility: Immediate violations reflect lack of trust and weak enforcement.
- Lebanon's Strategic Position: Seen as part of Iran-backed "Resistance Axis" (including Hezbollah).
- Humanitarian Impact: Large-scale civilian casualties in Beirut.
- Energy Security Concern:
  - Strait of Hormuz carries nearly 20% of global oil supply.
- Nuclear Dispute:
  - Iran insists on its right to uranium enrichment under peaceful use provisions.
- Geopolitical Implications:
  - U.S. involvement signals broader West Asian strategic contest.

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea.
- Principle of freedom of navigation under UNCLOS.
- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT):
  - Permits peaceful nuclear use but restricts weaponization.
- West Asian geopolitics linked with:
  - Proxy conflicts
  - Sectarian divides
- India's crude oil import dependence (~85%)—Energy security concern.

Critical Analysis

Positive Dimensions

- Indicates scope for diplomatic engagement despite tensions.
- U.S.–Iran talks could revive nuclear negotiation frameworks.
- Reinforces need for multilateral conflict resolution mechanisms.

Concerns

- Ceasefire violations reduce credibility of agreements.
- Civilian casualties raise concerns under international humanitarian law.
- Possible disruption of Strait of Hormuz threatens global energy supply.
- Nuclear disagreement increases proliferation risks.
- Risk of regional escalation involving multiple actors.

Way Forward

- Strengthen ceasefire monitoring through neutral international mechanisms (e.g., UN-led oversight).
- Promote sustained diplomatic dialogue including regional stakeholders.
- Ensure adherence to international humanitarian law.
- Secure global energy routes through multilateral cooperation.
- Revive nuclear agreements with balanced safeguards and verification.

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

West Asia war cuts India's growth outlook to 6.6%

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The World Bank has revised downwards India's growth outlook for 2026-27 to 6.6% from 7.2%, citing the impact of the war in West Asia on household and government consumption, as well as on industrial activity.

The India Development Update report by the World Bank said that "in the absence of the conflict", India's GDP growth was projected at 7.2%, a reflection of better-than-expected growth in 2025-26, "strong initial momentum" in the fourth quarter of that year and a "broad pro-growth reform agenda". "Growth is now projected at 6.6% in FY27, reflecting headwinds from the Middle East conflict – assuming an extended disruption in global energy (oil and gas) supply till end-2026," the report said.

The India Development Update report is a companion to the South Asia Economic Update 2026. That report had projected growth in South Asia to slow to 6.3% in 2026 from 7% in 2025 due to disruptions in energy markets.

The World Bank's Acting Director for India Paul Procee noted that there are things that can be done to boost growth. "Boosting private sector-led growth will be critical to strengthening economic resilience and supporting more young people to enter the workforce," Mr. Procee said.

Cross-sector slowdown

The report said that industrial activity is expected to slow to 7.5% in 2026-27 from 8.8% in the previous year. It said that the manufacturing sector – especially electronics, automobiles, and other tradable goods – will prop up industrial growth.

"However, higher input costs and decreased export demand from the Gulf region will weigh on overall industrial growth," the report said. "Business services are likely to be impacted by the global economic slowdown and higher input costs (particularly of LPG) will adversely impact food and accommodation services."

The report went on to say that there are "substantial downside risks" to its outlook, suggesting that growth could slow further if the conflict in West Asia is prolonged. "Although India can absorb temporary shocks, its reliance on energy imports from the region leaves the external balance, inflation, and fiscal position vulnerable," the report said. A disrupted labor market in Gulf economies could significantly lower remittances.

Notably, the report further said that, if the government and oil marketing companies continue to shield consumers from the full brunt of higher energy prices through excise rate cuts and increased subsidies, the government's fiscal consolidation efforts could reverse.

Revised figures

World Bank reports says that 'in the absence of the conflict', India's GDP growth would have been 7.2%

OUTLOOK FOR FY27:

- Real GDP growth: **6.6% vs 7.6%** in FY26
- Inflation (Consumer Price Index): **4.9% vs 2.3%** in FY26
- Net FDI, inflow (as % of GDP): **0.6 vs 0.5** in FY26

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- World Bank has revised India's GDP growth forecast for 2026–27 to 6.6%, down from 7.2%.
- The revision is attributed to ongoing conflict in West Asia (Middle East) affecting global energy markets.
- The projection assumes prolonged disruption in oil and gas supply till end-2026.
- The estimate comes from the India Development Update (2026), companion to the South Asia Economic Update 2026.
- South Asia's overall growth is also projected to slow to 6.3% in 2026 (from 7% in 2025).

Key Points

- Growth Drivers (Earlier Projection – 7.2%)Strong momentum from Q4 of FY26
- Pro-growth reforms and macroeconomic stability
- Revised Growth (6.6%) due to:Rising energy prices (oil & gas)
- Reduced household consumption
- Lower government spending flexibility
- Sectoral Impact:Industrial growth expected to decline to 7.5% (from 8.8%)
- Manufacturing (electronics, automobiles) remains a key support
- Services sector (business, hospitality) faces input cost pressures
- External Sector Risks:India's high dependence on energy imports
- Lower export demand from Gulf economies
- Potential fall in remittances due to labour market disruption in Gulf
- Fiscal Concerns:Subsidies and excise cuts to cushion fuel prices may derail fiscal consolidation

Static Linkages

- India imports ~85% of its crude oil requirement (Economic Survey trends).
- Oil price rise leads to cost-push inflation → impacts CPI and WPI.
- Twin deficit problem: Fiscal deficit + Current Account Deficit worsen with high oil prices.
- Remittances form a key part of India's external sector (~$100+ billion annually, RBI trends).
- Industrial growth measured via Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
- GDP estimation based on Gross Value Added (GVA) across sectors.

Critical Analysis

Positives / Resilience Factors

- Strong domestic demand base cushions shocks
- Diversified economy with strong services sector
- Government's reform agenda (PLI schemes, infrastructure push)
- Manufacturing sectors like electronics & automobiles show resilience

Concerns / Challenges

- High energy import dependence → vulnerability to geopolitical shocks
- Inflationary pressure due to fuel price rise
- Risk to fiscal discipline due to subsidies
- Declining export demand from Gulf region
- Possible fall in remittances, affecting current account

Stakeholder Perspectives

- Government: Balancing growth vs fiscal prudence
- Industry: Facing rising input costs and demand slowdown
- Consumers: Reduced purchasing power due to inflation
- Global institutions: Emphasizing private sector-led growth

Way Forward

- Diversify energy sources via renewables and strategic reserves
- Accelerate domestic manufacturing under Make in India
- Enhance export diversification beyond Gulf markets
- Strengthen fiscal consolidation roadmap while targeting subsidies
- Promote private investment and ease of doing business
- Boost skilling and employment generation for demographic dividend

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

Making scholarships integral to India's academic culture

Pramath Raj Sinha

Founder and Chairperson, Board of Trustees, Ashoka University, Delhi-NCR. Views expressed are personal and do not reflect the views of the University

If India is to take its Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education to 50%, the question is not only how many institutions the country can build, but who is actually able to walk through their gates and graduate.

India has been making gradual progress to expand capacity; the number of higher educational institutions has grown from 51,534 (2014-15) to over 70,000 last year, as per the 2025-26 Economic Survey. Yet the national GER stands at 29.5 (2022-23). Such limited participation highlights that seats alone do not create students. Education transforms lives when access, affordability, and academic quality come together. For many young Indians, especially in second-and third-tier towns, the binding constraint is not aspiration; it is the cost and risk of participation. This is why scholarships cannot remain a peripheral add-on to the system. They need to be designed, and tailored as an integral and embedded pathway into higher education.

A pressing need

The country is witnessing three intersecting challenges. There is an access challenge across regions and social groups; an affordability challenge that turns higher education into a long-term investment for families; and a quality challenge that determines whether and to what extent enrolment translates into true learning and occupational pursuit. Enrolment rises when those who qualify can afford to participate, and when institutions are confident that diversity and merit will strengthen, not dilute, academic life.

India knows this well: there is a lot of talent that is widely distributed, but with no opportunity. Increasing enrolments will depend less on convincing already advantaged families and more on releasing the pool of capable students who are currently held back by cost, distance, and uncertainty about the benefits of enrolment. Scholarships sit precisely at this hinge point. They are not only instruments of financial support; they can also mould a student's life, ensuring academic fulfilment as well as overall individual enhancement through provisions beyond material aid, such as leadership development, exposure to a wider world of interests, and career guidance.

The Department of Higher Education supports students through scholarships, interest subsidies on education loans, and credit guarantees. The National Scholarship Portal functions as a common window for State schemes, and hosts information on scholarship programmes across ministries, departments and regulatory bodies. One such programme is the Central Sector Scheme of Scholarship for College and University Students that provides up to 82,000 scholarships each year across undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional courses. Alongside this, corporate foundations, trusts, and non-profits have also created well-known programmes, often focused on merit-cum-means in fields such as engineering and management.

While this is meaningful progress, most scholarships are limited in number, and are still treated as financial plug-ins. The deeper question is whether scholarships can become a pathway which students actively opt into not only for financial reasons, but also for academic community and mentorship.

Lessons from history

India's own history should be the first source of inspiration. In the ancient institution of higher learning, *Takshashila*, students were known to have had as many as five options to pay their education fees: pay up front; work with and learn from the teachers; defer and pay after graduation; receive scholarships from home regions; or rely on support from a charitable community for disadvantaged students. The principle was straightforward – ability should not be turned away for lack of means, and that institutions should find ways to welcome talent.

The opportunity before India is not only to improve scholarships, but to reimagine what a scholarship represents. One can imagine scholarships that are designed as multi-year commitments rather than annual renewals, giving students the confidence to plan their academic lives with a certain stability. Institutional density and enrolment can be studied in order to design region-based scholarships that focus on underserved States and districts. One can also imagine programme-specific pathways that link scholarships to areas of national and regional need. A scholarship attached to a vocational degree in artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, or healthcare, anchored in a district with low participation but high demand, could raise enrolment while strengthening skills and employability.

Public policy and regulation can gently encourage this shift. Incentives such as tax benefits for endowments, or matching funds through private philanthropy, can attract long-term capital into scholarships that are designed to grow and sustain.

Performance-linked frameworks can recognise and reward institutions that demonstrate outcomes across merit, need, and potential. India already has early examples of what such thinking can look like. Ashoka University evaluates financial aid independently of academic admission, following a need-sensitive process where a student's ability to pay is assessed separately from the admission decision. About 20% students receive free education owing to a 100% scholarship, and roughly half of the students receive some form of financial support, while maintaining strong academic standards. The Indian School of Business (ISB) has built a donor-supported scholarship ecosystem across categories that reflect merit and need, including support for those from the armed forces and those who are returning to the development sector. Every year, the ISB awards between 250 and 280 scholarships across its programmes, and notably, 40% of the founding class of the recently launched PGP-Young Leaders programme is supported by scholarships. In both cases, scholarships are not an afterthought. They are critical to the kind of academic community these institutions are trying to build.

International experience reinforces the point. Whether it be multidisciplinary scholarship programmes at U.S. universities or provincial and city-level scholarships in China aligned to local development priorities, the most effective systems treat scholarships as a core part of their academic cultures.

From the margins to the centre

India still needs to expand and diversify its higher educational system. But expansion alone will not deliver a 50% enrolment ratio that also deepens learning and social mobility. Meaningful absorption can only happen when capable students are supported and inspired to look ahead, regardless of where they come from.

This is not a narrow funding conversation; it is about building an ecosystem. Scholarships sit at the intersection of equity, quality, and growth. They influence who and how many enter higher education, and who persists. They shape the social and intellectual life of campuses and the credibility of institutions. They also contribute to the nation's trajectory, throwing light on how its talent is discovered, understood, and developed.

If the goal is not only more students, but also more mobility and national capability, then scholarships deserve to move from the margins to the centre of our higher education strategy.

> Scholarships sit at the intersection of equity, quality, and growth. They influence who and how many enter higher education, and who persists

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- India aims to achieve 50% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education as envisioned in the National Education Policy 2020.
- Current GER stands at 29.5% (2022–23) despite expansion in institutions from 51,534 (2014–15) to over 70,000.
- Key concern: capacity expansion alone is insufficient; access, affordability, and quality remain barriers.
- Scholarships are increasingly being viewed as central policy tools, not peripheral financial aids.

Key Points

- Three major challenges:Access disparities across regions and social groups
- Affordability constraints (high private cost of education)
- Quality concerns affecting employability outcomes
- Existing initiatives:National Scholarship Portal – single-window system for multiple schemes
- Central Sector Scheme of Scholarship for College and University Students – ~82,000 scholarships annually
- Interest subsidy and credit guarantee schemes for education loans

- Key insight: "Seats alone do not create students"; financial and social barriers limit participation.
- Scholarships can also provide:
  - Mentorship and career guidance
  - Exposure and leadership development
  - Social mobility and inclusion

Static Linkages

- Gross Enrolment Ratio = Enrolled population (18–23 age group) ÷ total population in that age group
- Directive Principles emphasize promotion of education and equal opportunity
- Human capital formation is a key driver of economic growth
- Public expenditure on education target: 6% of GDP (policy recommendation)
- Social justice principle: equitable access to education for disadvantaged groups

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Scholarships improve equity and inclusion by supporting disadvantaged groups
- Enhance GER without excessive infrastructure burden
- Promote meritocracy and diversity in institutions
- Strengthen human capital and employability

Concerns

- Limited number of scholarships relative to demand
- Fragmented schemes across ministries → inefficiency
- Overemphasis on financial aid only, neglecting mentoring/support
- Risk of regional and social exclusion if poorly targeted
- Loan-based financing may increase debt burden on students

Stakeholder Perspectives

- Students: Need affordability + certainty of support
- Institutions: Need incentives for inclusive admissions
- Government: Balancing fiscal constraints with expansion goals
- Private sector: Role in philanthropy and endowments

Way Forward

- Shift scholarships from "add-on" to "core policy instrument"
- Design multi-year scholarships for stability
- Introduce region-specific and district-focused scholarships
- Link scholarships to skill-demand sectors (AI, healthcare, manufacturing)
- Promote public-private partnerships and philanthropic endowments
- Incentivize institutions through performance-linked funding
- Integrate scholarships with mentorship, internships, and career support
- Ensure data-driven targeting via digital platforms

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

Nari Shakti, India's defining reform for the next decade

Sangita Reddy

Joint Managing Director, Apollo Hospitals

Over the past decade, India has done something few nations have achieved at scale: it has moved women's empowerment from intent to infrastructure. This shift did not happen organically; it was designed. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, policy has placed women at the centre of development recognising that when women move forward, entire economies accelerate.

The results are visible and measurable. More than 57 crore bank accounts have been opened under the PM Jan Dhan Yojana, with over 55% held by women, giving millions their first foothold in the formal financial system. Nearly 10 crore women, organised into over 90 lakh self-help groups, are now driving grassroots entrepreneurship and local economic resilience. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana has reached over 10.5 crore households, reducing health risks and freeing women from time-intensive labour. Moreover, access to credit has expanded, with close to 70% of MUDRA loans going to women entrepreneurs. Female labour force participation has also risen to nearly 37%, reversing a long-standing decline.

In healthcare, programmes such as the Ayushman Bharat and the Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan have expanded access and reduced vulnerability at critical life stages. Initiatives like the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme have begun to shift deeply embedded social attitudes.

Individually, these are strong programmes. Taken together, they represent a structural shift in how India views women not as recipients of support, but as drivers of growth. For policymakers and administrators, this offers a clear lesson: scale works when design, delivery, and accountability are aligned.

In healthcare, where the author's expertise lies, outcomes improve when systems are built around real needs, and not theoretical models. Where access is simplified; delivery is consistent; and outcomes are tracked, impact follows. And yet, the next phase will demand even greater focus, as the challenge before us is no longer policy creation, it is policy penetration.

The last mile

Despite the scale of programmes, awareness gaps remain. Enrolment is uneven, and last-mile delivery continues to depend on local capacity. For every woman who has accessed opportunity, there are many more who remain on the margins due to lack of access. This is where administrative leadership becomes decisive.

India must move from announcing schemes to ensuring saturation; from measuring outputs to tracking outcomes; and from eligibility on paper to access in practice. District-level ownership, data-driven monitoring, and convergence across departments will be critical. And while technology can accelerate this, it cannot replace on-ground accountability. Therefore, the question for every policymaker is simple: how do we ensure that no eligible woman is left out?

This is where the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam can become one of the most consequential reforms of our time. By expanding women's representation in legislative bodies, it creates the possibility of aligning policy design with lived experience. Women leaders can bring their insights shaped by community realities which can strengthen programmes, and their delivery, targeting, and adoption.

Additionally, the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam when implemented with intent, can trigger a multiplier effect with more women in leadership, more responsive policy, higher participation, and stronger leadership pipelines, making reform self-reinforcing.

Globally, we are entering a decade defined by knowledge, innovation, and technology. India already has a strong base, with one of the highest proportions of women in STEM education globally. This is an opportune moment to translate this gain into leadership across sectors such as healthcare, science, enterprise, and governance without losing time.

The past decade has shown what is possible when political will aligns with policy design. With today's strong foundation, the implementation of Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam can move empowerment beyond access, to authority.

The way forward

However, representation must translate into capability, and capability must be built through institutional support to ensure that implementation delivers results. Over the next five years, India must invest in preparing women to lead not just electorally, but institutionally. This means structured mentorship, policy exposure, and administrative support systems that enable effective governance.

It also means rethinking how the country designs policy itself. Programmes must be simpler to access and faster to deliver. Feedback loops must be strengthened so that policy evolves with need. And success must be measured not just by coverage, but by change in outcomes across sectors. As India moves towards its vision of becoming a developed nation by 2047, this is not a peripheral agenda – it is central to its success. Women's participation is directly linked to economic growth, social stability, and institutional effectiveness.

If India can achieve saturation in access, strengthen participation, and enable leadership, it will not just empower its women – it will redefine its growth trajectory. For policymakers and administrators, the mandate is clear: the time to implement is now.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Over the past decade, India has undertaken a policy-driven expansion of women's empowerment, shifting from welfare to infrastructure-based inclusion.
- Large-scale flagship schemes have targeted financial inclusion, health, clean energy, and entrepreneurship for women.
- Recent discourse emphasizes moving from policy creation to effective last-mile delivery and saturation.
- The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (Women's Reservation Act) is seen as a transformative step toward institutional empowerment and political representation.
- The focus is now on policy penetration, outcome-based governance, and leadership participation of women in India's development trajectory.

Key Points

- Financial InclusionPM Jan Dhan Yojana: ~57 crore accounts; >55% held by women.
- Self-Help Groups (SHGs)~10 crore women across 90 lakh SHGs, driving grassroots economic activity.
- Clean Energy & WelfarePM Ujjwala Yojana: 10.5 crore households covered, reducing indoor pollution and drudgery.
- Entrepreneurship~70% of MUDRA loans allocated to women entrepreneurs.
- Labour Force ParticipationFemale Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) ~37%, showing recovery.
- Health InitiativesAyushman Bharat, PMSMA improving maternal and general healthcare access.
- Social ChangeBeti Bachao Beti Padhao targeting gender bias and declining child sex ratio.
- Governance ReformEmphasis on district-level monitoring, convergence, and accountability for last-mile delivery.

Static Linkages

- Fundamental Rights: Equality before law, prohibition of discrimination (Articles 14, 15, 16)
- Directive Principles: Article 39(a), 39(d), 42 (women's welfare and equal pay)
- 73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendments: Reservation for women in local governance
- Human Development Indicators: Gender Development Index (GDI), Gender Inequality Index (GII)
- Economic Survey: Link between women's participation and GDP growth
- SHG-Bank Linkage Programme (NABARD)
- Concepts: Inclusive growth, demographic dividend, social capital

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Shift to women-led development rather than welfare dependency
- Strong financial inclusion architecture (DBT, banking access)
- Improved health, dignity, and reduction in drudgery
- Rise in entrepreneurship and SHG-based livelihoods
- Potential for better policy outcomes via political representation

Challenges

- Last-mile delivery gaps and uneven implementation
- Regional and socio-economic disparities
- Low awareness and digital divide
- Persistent patriarchal norms limiting agency
- Capacity constraints in newly emerging women leadership

Way Forward

- Achieve saturation of schemes through targeted identification
- Strengthen district-level monitoring and accountability mechanisms
- Ensure convergence of schemes (health, finance, livelihood)
- Invest in capacity-building, training, and leadership development
- Shift from output to outcome-based evaluation
- Promote digital literacy and access for women
- Institutionalize feedback-driven policy design

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

Bengal blues

SIR, not governance, dominates political discourse in poll-bound Bengal

West Bengal, one of the largest and politically consequential States in eastern India, goes to polls on April 23, with a second phase on April 29. As attention shifts from other elections held on Thursday, the eastern State presents a dispiriting picture. An election that should be about governance and livelihoods is instead being fought over identity and the composition of the electoral roll itself. The Trinamool Congress has been in power for three terms after wresting power from the Left Front. In a more rational world, the outcome of the 2026 Assembly elections would have depended upon the performance of the Mamata Banerjee-led government over the last 15 years and how it has positioned a State that continues to occupy a middling or low rank in major socio-economic indicators. Yet, governance has almost never been the criterion that has determined voter choices in the State in the recent past, and this election does not seem to be an exception. The State, one of a dozen that underwent a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process carried out by the Election Commission of India, registered a drop of 91 lakh electors – a 12% decrease. Ground reports revealed that the exercise, unlike in Bihar, where deletions were more evenly distributed on communal lines, disproportionately affected minority electors and those living in the border districts of West Bengal. Apart from those deleted initially in the SIR enumeration process, more than 60 lakh voters were flagged as having "logical discrepancies" in the draft roll. The Supreme Court, which had to intervene to decide the eligibility of these electors, appointed judicial officers for the task. But that process resulted in the disenfranchisement of 27 lakh electors, who have now been given the option of approaching tribunals. There is no clarity on whether this tribunal process will conclude before the election.

The anger on the ground over the SIR and the onerous burdens placed on electors to prove their eligibility, due to largely a flawed enumeration process adopted by an insouciant ECI, has now become an election issue on its own, sidestepping civic and governance issues. The Trinamool has projected the discontents over the SIR as a consequence of the Centre's and the ECI's machinations, while the BJP has wielded the SIR as a tool to polarise elections on religious lines. West Bengal desperately requires a polity where contestation is over how to revive employment-driven industrial growth in a largely agrarian and services economy, not over the religious and linguistic identities of voters.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Assembly elections in West Bengal scheduled in two phases (April 23 and April 29, 2026).
- Electoral contest dominated by issues related to voter identity and electoral roll revision rather than governance.
- Special Intensive Revision (SIR) conducted by the Election Commission of India led to deletion of ~91 lakh voters (~12%).
- Disproportionate impact reported on minority communities and border districts.
- Over 60 lakh voters flagged for discrepancies; judicial scrutiny by Supreme Court of India led to ~27 lakh disenfranchised.
- Tribunal-based remedy remains uncertain before elections.

Key Points

- Electoral roll revision is a statutory exercise under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
- Large-scale deletions raise concerns over inclusiveness and procedural fairness.
- Burden of proof placed on voters to establish eligibility.
- Political polarization around electoral integrity vs exclusion narrative.
- Shift from development issues (employment, industrial growth) to identity politics.
- Raises concerns regarding free and fair elections (basic structure doctrine).

Static Linkages

- Article 324 – Superintendence, direction and control of elections
- Article 326 – Universal Adult Suffrage
- Representation of the People Act, 1950 (electoral rolls)
- Representation of the People Act, 1951 (conduct of elections)
- Basic Structure Doctrine – Free and Fair Elections
- Article 14 – Equality before law
- Rule of Law and Natural Justice principles
- Federalism and Centre-State relations

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Periodic revision ensures removal of duplicate and bogus voters.
- Enhances credibility of electoral rolls if conducted impartially.
- Judicial intervention ensures constitutional safeguards.

Negatives

- Mass deletion risks disenfranchisement of genuine voters.
- Possible violation of equality and inclusiveness (Article 14).
- Administrative burden on vulnerable populations.
- Timing close to elections undermines electoral confidence.
- Politicisation weakens neutrality of Election Commission.

Key Issues

- Balancing electoral integrity vs voter inclusion.
- Institutional credibility of ECI.
- Impact on democratic participation.

Way Forward

- Transparent and verifiable electoral roll revision mechanisms.
- Time-bound grievance redressal before elections.
- Avoid large-scale revisions near election schedule.
- Use technology with safeguards (de-duplication, digitisation).
- Independent oversight and audits of electoral processes.
- Promote issue-based electoral discourse (development-focused).

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

Timely inaction

Slowing growth and rising inflation necessitated unchanged rates

The RBI Monetary Policy Committee's (MPC) decision to keep interest rates unchanged – a "wait and watch" approach, in the Governor's words – is a sensible move. At a time when hasty words and deeds have roiled world markets, economies, and even households, a measured policy response was the need of the hour. The challenge before the MPC is that the main tool it has – the repo rate – impacts growth and inflation in opposite ways. That is, if it had raised rates to try to contain an anticipated surge in inflation, this would have hurt growth. On the other hand, if it lowered rates to boost growth, this would have pushed inflation up. The war in West Asia has resulted in both of these undesirable outcomes: supply chain constraints have pushed up costs while also dragging down growth. A rate change at this juncture could have made matters significantly worse and further dampened the mood in the economy. In his speech, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra predicted that India's GDP would grow 6.9% in 2026-27. Given that this is still the first month of the financial year, the forecast is likely to change considerably over the subsequent MPC announcements. For example, the MPC in April last year had predicted that growth in 2025-26 would be 6.5%. In contrast, the government's latest estimate for the year is 7.6%. Considerable uncertainty continues to persist in West Asia, with shipping companies still hesitant to brave the Strait of Hormuz.

All of this, coupled with the fuel constraints, will continue to hamper growth in 2026-27. The RBI lowered its growth forecast for the first quarter by just 0.1 percentage points, which might end up being an over-optimistic reading of the situation. The World Bank's India Development Update report, released on Thursday, predicts a slowdown in industrial growth in India over the course of this financial year. Consumer and government demand, too, is expected to slow as both groups try to tighten their belts. Inflation, on the other hand, is expected to accelerate considerably to 4.6%, according to the RBI. Yet, the MPC was correct not to raise rates since most of the inflationary pressure is due to supply issues rather than demand conditions. Raising rates would not only have slowed growth further, but even the primary objective of containing inflation would not have been met. A lot of factors need to play out before monetary policy can act – the war, the U.S. tariff-related investigations, greater clarity on a potential El Nino impact on the monsoon this year, to name a few. Until then, inaction is the best course of action.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to keep the repo rate unchanged, adopting a "wait and watch" approach.
- The decision comes amid global economic uncertainty, particularly due to the West Asia conflict affecting supply chains and energy prices.
- The RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra projected GDP growth at 6.9% for 2026–27, while acknowledging high uncertainty.
- Inflation is expected to rise to around 4.6%, mainly driven by supply-side pressures rather than demand.
- External risks include tensions around the Strait of Hormuz, U.S. trade actions, and possible El Niño impact on monsoon.

Key Points

- Status quo on repo rate to balance inflation-growth trade-off.
- Supply-side inflation: Driven by fuel costs, logistics disruptions, not excess demand.
- Growth concerns:
  - Industrial slowdown flagged by World Bank
  - Weak consumption (households + government tightening spending)
- Forecast uncertainties:
  - Volatile global crude prices
  - Trade tensions (tariffs, investigations)
  - Monsoon variability (El Niño risk)
- Transmission challenge: Repo rate changes affect:
  - Inflation (via demand compression)
  - Growth (via credit cost changes)
- Policy rationale: Rate hike would not reduce supply-driven inflation but would hurt growth further.

Static Linkages

- Monetary policy tools: Repo rate, Reverse repo rate, CRR, SLR
- Inflation types: Demand-pull vs Cost-push inflation
- Phillips Curve: Inflation–unemployment trade-off
- GDP components: Consumption, Investment, Government expenditure, Net exports
- Monetary Policy Committee (MPC): Composition, voting, inflation targeting (4% ± 2%)
- Transmission mechanism of monetary policy
- External sector vulnerabilities: Oil imports, current account deficit
- Role of expectations in macroeconomic stability

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Prevents premature tightening, supporting growth
- Correctly identifies supply-side inflation, where monetary policy has limited role
- Maintains policy stability and investor confidence
- Avoids negative impact on credit flow and investment

Limitations

- Inflation may remain sticky in short term
- Risk of erosion of RBI credibility if inflation persists above target
- Real interest rates may become less effective

Challenges

- Managing stagflation-like situation (low growth + high inflation)
- High dependence on imported crude oil
- Uncertainty due to global geopolitics and climate factors

Way Forward

- Focus on supply-side measures (fuel tax rationalisation, logistics improvement)
- Strengthen energy security (diversification, renewables)
- Improve monetary-fiscal coordination
- Enhance data-based forward guidance
- Build resilience against external shocks and trade disruptions

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

A post-Iran war West Asia order can open strategic space for India

SHYAM SARAN

THE DECLARATION of a two-week pause in the Iran war has been greeted with a collective sigh of relief across a deeply anxious world. There will be endless analysis and speculation about who may have won and who may have lost the six-week war between Iran on one side and the US and Israel on the other. But that would be premature since this is not an end to the war, only the prospect of its end. US President Donald Trump has agreed to negotiate a more durable peace based on a set of 10 Iranian demands — all takes, no gives — conveyed through the good offices of Pakistan. There is no mention of the 15 points put forward by the US earlier. This one-sidedness is unusual in any negotiating exercise and puts Iran in an advantageous position. It suggests a certain urgency on Trump's part to call a halt to the war, perhaps because of its mounting cost, its fuelling inflation in a year when crucial mid-term elections are due, and a recognition of Iran proving to be more resilient under fire than anticipated. One should expect the US to seek to extend the pause into a longer suspension of hostilities, always with the caveat that Trump's unpredictability and impulsiveness could upend any rational calculation. Just a few hours before the ceasefire, he was threatening to "extinguish" Iranian civilisation if his demands were not met.

Pakistan has undeniably emerged as a key intermediary in the proposed negotiations to be hosted by it in Islamabad on April 10. It is reported that the powerful Speaker of the Majlis, Iran's parliament, M B Ghalibaf, will lead the Iranian delegation. The US side may be led by Vice President J D Vance. China will be an unseen but influential presence. Trump publicly gave it credit for having contributed to the ceasefire. Pakistan will bask in the limelight, celebrating its return to geopolitical prominence, not as a spoiler but as a trusted intermediary, harking back to 1971, when it enabled Henry Kissinger's secret visit to China. That India will merely watch from the sidelines, even though it is a major stakeholder in the Gulf and West Asia, will be savoured by Islamabad. It may be tempted into provocative behaviour towards India, feeling shielded, once again, by Washington and Beijing alike.

In dealing with this new situation, the temptation to engage in sharpened rhetoric and assertive diplomacy may be counterproductive. It may be prudent to monitor progress in the negotiations, convey goodwill and support to our Gulf and West Asian partners. They will value strong and reliable partners as they deal with the aftermath of the destructive war. The region will be reassessing its security architecture, which has hitherto been based on a string of US military bases hosted by them. But these failed to protect them from relentless Iranian missile and drone attacks. It also became obvious to them that for the Americans, the defence of Israel would always have priority over their security needs. There is no immediate alternative to reliance on the US, but a process of diversification will inevitably take place. India should get into pole position in this process by enhancing its defence collaboration with these countries. This should take place within a high-level dialogue on the transformed security landscape in a region of vital interest to India. The reconstruction and rehabilitation of infrastructure damaged in the war will also offer opportunities for a constructive role by Indian companies, which are already well entrenched in the region and have developed benign partnerships.

> A US-led security architecture in the region, including Israel as a key pillar, has diminishing prospects. India inserting itself into such arrangements had some rationale in the past, but may have lost its relevance now

If India must contribute substantially to an enduring security architecture on its western flank, then it will need to recalibrate its relations with Israel and Iran. Israel will remain a valued security partner, but it should not inhibit the pursuit of our relations with other countries in the region in line with our interests. We should acknowledge that we let our relations with Iran slide while pursuing initiatives like I2U2 (Israel, India, the UAE and the US) and IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor), which excluded Iran and Turkey. In the wake of the Iran war, the US role in the region has become problematic, as has the prospect of a collaborative network of relationships between Israel and the Gulf countries. A US-led security architecture in the region, including Israel as a key pillar, has diminishing prospects. India inserting itself into such arrangements had some rationale in the past, but may have lost its relevance now. Irrespective of what happens in the coming negotiations, these broader trends unleashed by the war should be carefully assessed and acted upon. It is always better to stay ahead of the curve.

What about the larger geopolitical equations? The US has suffered grievous reputational damage both for its indulgence in unrestrained violence and its inability to pursue a well-crafted strategy with credible outcomes. It won on tactics but may have lost the war. This is the first time in the post-World War II period that the US was unable to mobilise support from its NATO and European allies. This confirms the perception of there no longer being a West with a coherent identity and shared values. China has gained in stature by default, and to a lesser extent, Russia. One should expect diminished US attention to the Indo-Pacific. It's been stripped of military assets because of the Iran war. These will take time to be replenished. Its allies and partners in the region are already questioning the wisdom of outsourcing their security to the US. Japan and South Korea find themselves especially vulnerable.

One should also note the visit of the Taiwan Opposition leader, the head of the KMT party, to Beijing at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping. China senses an opportunity to unify Taiwan with the mainland by convincing Taiwanese leaders and its people that they can no longer rely on the US for their defence. Trump's forthcoming visit to China next month may provide a better sense of how far the US-China equation has now tilted towards the latter. These changes on our eastern flank, just as we must cope with the turmoil on our western flank, will throw up additional challenges for Indian diplomacy.

That will require a separate examination.

The writer is a former foreign secretary

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- A tentative ceasefire has been declared after a prolonged conflict involving Iran, United States, and Israel, though it signals only a pause rather than a definitive end to hostilities.
- Negotiations for a durable peace are expected, with Pakistan acting as a key intermediary and hosting talks.
- The conflict has exposed vulnerabilities in the existing US-led security architecture in West Asia and raised questions about its effectiveness.
- The war has had broader geopolitical consequences, including reputational damage to the US and increased strategic space for China and Russia.
- India remains a significant stakeholder in the region but has largely been a passive observer during the conflict.

Key Points

- Ceasefire reflects strategic compulsions rather than resolution of core disputes.
- Iran appears to have gained leverage in negotiations due to resilience and asymmetric capabilities (missiles, drones).
- Pakistan's diplomatic role signals its re-emergence as a geopolitical intermediary.
- US inability to mobilize NATO/European allies highlights fragmentation of Western unity.
- Gulf countries are reassessing reliance on US security guarantees.
- Potential decline of US-led regional security architecture.
- Opportunities for diversification of defence partnerships in West Asia.
- India faces challenges on both western (West Asia instability) and eastern fronts (China-Taiwan dynamics).

Static Linkages

- Balance of Power theory in international relations.
- Strategic autonomy in foreign policy.
- Role of intermediaries in diplomacy (Track-I diplomacy).
- Energy security and dependence on West Asia.
- Defence cooperation and military alliances.
- Concepts of multipolar world order.
- Impact of war on global inflation and supply chains.

Critical Analysis

Pros

- Opportunity for India to expand diplomatic and strategic engagement in West Asia.
- Emergence of multipolarity aligns with India's strategic autonomy.
- Economic opportunities in post-war reconstruction.

Cons

- Threat to India's energy security and trade routes.
- Increased instability in India's extended neighbourhood.
- Pakistan's enhanced diplomatic role may impact India's interests.
- Reduced US focus on Indo-Pacific could strengthen China's position.

Way Forward

- Maintain balanced relations with Iran, Israel, and Gulf countries.
- Strengthen energy diversification and strategic reserves.
- Expand defence and maritime cooperation with West Asian partners.
- Enhance diplomatic presence in regional security dialogues.
- Monitor China's expanding influence in both West Asia and Indo-Pacific.

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

Trump should rein Netanyahu in

AHEAD OF scheduled talks between the US and Iran in Islamabad on Friday — the American delegation will include Vice President J D Vance — the fragile two-week ceasefire announced earlier this week already appears to be wavering. On Wednesday, PM Benjamin Netanyahu, whose military adventurism in Iran hasn't gone according to plan, intensified Israel's bombing campaign against the Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon, carrying out its deadliest attack so far, killing at least 250 people. In response, Iran has reportedly again closed the Strait of Hormuz, despite the ceasefire's provision guaranteeing the safe passage of vessels. Iran and mediator Pakistan maintain that Lebanon was part of the deal; the US and Israel have denied this. Should Iran withdraw from the ceasefire over Israel's assault on Lebanon — potentially triggering a resumption of US military action — diplomacy could again give way to hostilities.

US President Donald Trump must rein in Netanyahu, the only player who could arguably benefit politically from a prolonged conflict. The US remains the only actor capable of compelling Israel to alter its course. It did so in June last year, when Israel struck Iran despite a ceasefire in their 12-day war. Israel's assault on Lebanon has drawn criticism from France, Spain, Italy, the UK and the EU. But Netanyahu, who has earned himself a reputation as a serial disruptor of settlements in recent years, has said that, despite the ceasefire, Israel will continue to strike Hezbollah "wherever necessary".

Since its emergence after the 1982 Lebanon War, Hezbollah has been seen to pose a direct threat to Israel's security. Yet recent history — including Israel's devastation of Gaza — would suggest that indiscriminate attacks on Lebanon that are reportedly causing widespread civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure are more likely to help Hezbollah dig in its heels. The Lebanese government has indicated its intent to disarm the militant group, but has so far lacked the capacity. Now, Israel's plan to establish a new security zone south of the Litani River, in what is its seventh invasion of Lebanon, amounts to illegal annexation amid a deepening humanitarian crisis: More than a million people in Lebanon have been displaced, and more than 1,700 killed. Such a fraught trajectory will only lead to further destabilisation of the country and heighten the risks of a wider conflagration. Trump must press Israel to hold its fire. The security of the entire region — and, by extension, global energy and food security — depends on it.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- A fragile two-week ceasefire between the United States and Iran is under strain ahead of scheduled diplomatic talks.
- Benjamin Netanyahu intensified military operations against Hezbollah in Lebanon, leading to heavy casualties.
- Iran reportedly responded by closing the Strait of Hormuz, a key global energy route.
- Disagreement persists over whether Lebanon was included in ceasefire provisions.
- Rising tensions risk escalation into a broader regional conflict involving major powers.

Key Points

- Ceasefire Fragility: Lack of clarity and trust deficit among stakeholders.
- Israel's Military Strategy:
  - Continued strikes despite ceasefire.
  - Plan to create a security zone south of Litani River.
- Humanitarian Crisis in Lebanon:
  - Over 1 million displaced.
  - More than 1,700 casualties reported.
- Iran's Strategic Move:
  - Closure of Strait of Hormuz threatens global oil supply.
- Global Reactions:
  - Criticism from European nations and the EU.
  - US seen as the only actor capable of influencing Israel.
- Hezbollah Factor:
  - Emerged after 1982 Lebanon War.
  - Acts as both militant group and political actor in Lebanon.

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz handles ~20% of global petroleum trade (Energy Geography – NCERT).
- Concept of ceasefire vs armistice vs peace treaty (International Relations basics).
- UN Charter – Article 2(4): Prohibition on use of force.
- Geneva Conventions: Protection of civilians during conflict.
- West Asia geopolitics:
  - Proxy wars and sectarian divide (Shia–Sunni dynamics).
- India's Energy Security:
  - ~85% crude oil import dependence (Economic Survey).
- Diaspora and evacuation diplomacy (e.g., Operation Ganga, Operation Raahat).

Critical Analysis

- Security vs Humanitarian Concerns:
  - Israel's security objectives vs civilian protection obligations.
- Erosion of Ceasefire Norms:
  - Undermines diplomatic credibility and peace processes.
- Risk of Regional Escalation:
  - Possible Iran–Israel–US confrontation.
- Economic Implications:
  - Oil supply disruption → inflationary pressures globally.
- Complex Conflict Structure:
  - Presence of non-state actors like Hezbollah complicates negotiations.

Way Forward

- Enforce ceasefire through international monitoring mechanisms.
- Greater diplomatic engagement led by major powers and the UN.
- Ensure freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.
- Immediate humanitarian assistance and reconstruction support.
- Long-term political dialogue addressing root causes of conflict.

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

Delhi, Dhaka must sidestep short-termism

OVER THE better part of two decades, Delhi and Dhaka crafted one of the Subcontinent's most significant and stable bilateral relationships. Part of the reason for this was the conducive atmosphere created by the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government in Bangladesh. Hasina's perceived "pro-India" stance has become a thorny issue in her country since her ouster in August 2024, and matters were made worse by the political instability, including attacks on minorities. However, after the BNP's victory in the Bangladesh elections in February, it is clear that a more mature leadership on both sides is ready to reset ties. The visit by Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman is an important step in that journey.

According to the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry, the minister "reiterated its request to extradite Sheikh Hasina and her Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to Bangladesh, who have been awarded the death penalty by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT)". The demand must be read for what it is — a political statement by a new government. Delhi cannot acquiesce to the request, not least because the ICT was widely condemned as a politically partisan body. That said, there was much in the Foreign Minister's visit to steer ties back on track. Both sides reportedly discussed the importance of renewing the Ganga Water Treaty, which will expire in December. Bangladesh also expressed the need for greater supplies of fuel and fertilisers. Both countries have agreed to normalise the issuing of visas. For India, the most salient issue is securing the 4,156 km border. Cooperation along the border has helped maintain a stable frontier for both sides, including along India's northeastern states. Connectivity, energy cooperation and multilateral initiatives under bodies such as BIMSTEC depend on Dhaka and Delhi being on the same page.

To his credit, PM Tarique Rahman has struck a conciliatory note since his appointment. It is necessary to build on Dhaka's call for ties to be based on "mutual trust and respect and reciprocal benefit". Both countries share a history, culture and geography that make the gains of working together exponential. The task now is not to let the past — including the Hasina issue — become a roadblock. For the sake of the people of India and Bangladesh, their governments must insulate the relationship from a short-term politics.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Political transition in Bangladesh after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.
- Electoral victory of Bangladesh Nationalist Party led by Tarique Rahman.
- Visit of Bangladesh Foreign Minister to India indicates efforts to reset bilateral relations.
- Bangladesh raised demand for extradition of former leadership.

Key Points

- Extradition request via International Crimes Tribunal:
  - Considered politically sensitive
  - India unlikely to comply due to due process concerns
- Ganga Water Treaty:
  - Signed in 1996 for 30 years
  - Renewal due in 2026
- Bangladesh's demands:
  - Increased supply of fuel and fertilisers
- Areas of cooperation:
  - Visa normalisation
  - Border management (4,156 km boundary)
  - Trade and connectivity
- Strategic relevance:
  - Stability in Northeast India
  - Regional cooperation under BIMSTEC

Static Linkages

- Neighbourhood First Policy
- Act East Policy
- Extradition Act, 1962
- River water-sharing principles
- Border management and internal security
- Role of Northeast India in connectivity
- Regional groupings: BIMSTEC vs SAARC

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Opportunity to reset ties beyond regime-specific engagement
- Strengthening economic cooperation (trade, energy, connectivity)
- Enhances India's strategic position in Bay of Bengal

Challenges

- Political instability in Bangladesh
- Extradition issue may create diplomatic friction
- Water-sharing disputes remain sensitive
- Minority-related concerns affecting bilateral perception
- Expanding Chinese influence in Bangladesh

Stakeholders

- India: security, connectivity, regional influence
- Bangladesh: sovereignty, economic development
- Northeast India: stability and access to markets

Way Forward

- Insulate bilateral ties from domestic political changes
- Ensure timely renewal of Ganga Water Treaty with data transparency
- Strengthen border management using technology
- Expand energy cooperation and grid integration
- Enhance connectivity (road, rail, inland waterways)
- Use BIMSTEC for strengthening regional cooperation
- Promote people-to-people engagement

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY