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CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY
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Iran, U.S. blame each other as talks fail

- Talks collapsed over Iran's refusal to abandon nuclear weapon, says U.S. after 21-hours of talks
- Iran blames 'U.S. overreach' for the breakdown; the U.S. insists Iran end its nuclear programme
- Iran is not seeking weapons, but has the right to nuclear energy, a diplomatic official states

Associated Press
ISLAMABAD

The United States and Iran ended face-to-face talks in Pakistan on Sunday without an agreement, each side keeping the onus on the other without narrowing their differences and leaving a fragile two-week ceasefire in the war in West Asia in doubt.

U.S. officials said the talks collapsed over Iran's refusal to commit to abandoning the path to a nuclear weapon, while Iranian officials blamed the "U.S. overreach" for the breakdown of the talks without mentioning specific sticking points.

Neither side indicated what will happen after the truce expires on April 22.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said his country will try to facilitate a new dialogue in the coming days. "We need to see an affirmative commitment that they will not seek a nuclear weapon, and they will not seek the tools that would enable them to quickly achieve a nuclear weapon," U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance said after the 21-hour talks.

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who led the Iran delegation, said it was time for the U.S. "to decide whether it can gain our trust or not".

Fragile truce

Iran had very good initiatives to show goodwill in talks, which led to progress in the negotiations, the Iranian Speaker said in comments carried by state media on Sunday.

Iranian officials earlier said the talks fell apart over two or three key issues, withouth specifying them, blaming what they called U.S. overreach.

"It is imperative that the parties continue to uphold their commitment to cease fire," Pakistan's Foreign Minister said.

Iran has long denied seeking nuclear weapons but has insisted on its right to a civilian nuclear programme. It has offered "affirmative commitments" in the past in writing, including in the landmark 2015 nuclear deal.

Experts say its stockpile of enriched uranium, though not weapons-grade, is only a short technical step away.

Since the U.S. and Israel launched the war on February 28, it has killed at least 3,000 people in Iran, 2,020 in Lebanon, 23 in Israel, and more than a dozen in Gulf Arab states, and caused lasting damage to infrastructure in half-a-dozen West Asian countries.

Iran's grip on the Strait of Hormuz has largely cut off the Persian Gulf and its oil and gas exports from the global economy, sending energy prices soaring.

The deadlock – and Mr. Vance's take-it-or-leave-it proposal that Iran end its nuclear programme – mirrored February's nuclear talks in Switzerland.

Though United States President Donald Trump has said the subsequent war was meant to compel Iran's leaders to abandon nuclear ambitions, each side's positions appeared unchanged in negotiations following six weeks of fighting. An Iranian diplomatic official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, denied that negotiations had failed over Iran's nuclear ambitions.

"Iran is not seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, but it has the right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes," the official said, reiterating Iran's long-standing negotiating position. There was no word on whether they would resume, though Iran said it was open to continuing the dialogue, Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported.

The U.S. and Iran entered talks with sharply different proposals and contrasting assumptions about their leverage to end the war. Before negotiations began, the ceasefire was already threatened by deep disagreements and Israel's continued attacks against the Iranian-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Hanging in the balance

The breakdown of talks leaves doubt over the future of the two-week ceasefire in the war in West Asia

Winding up: Pakistan officials escort U.S. delegation leaving after the talks on Sunday. AFP

We need to see an affirmative commitment that they [Iran] will not seek a nuclear weapon
J.D. VANCE, U.S. Vice-President

It is time for the U.S. to decide whether it can gain our trust or not – **MOHAMMAD BAGHER GHALIBAF**, Iran Speaker

Trump threatens to blockade the Strait of Hormuz

ISLAMABAD/WASHINGTON
U.S. President Donald Trump on Sunday said on his Truth Social platform that the U.S. Navy would "immediately" begin a blockade to stop ships from entering or leaving the Strait of Hormuz, after U.S.-Iran peace talks in Pakistan ended without agreement. » PAGE 14

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- U.S. and Iran held direct talks in Pakistan to extend a two-week ceasefire in the ongoing West Asia conflict.
- Talks failed due to disagreements over Iran's nuclear programme.
- Ceasefire set to expire on April 22, raising risk of renewed conflict.
- Iran maintains control over the Strait of Hormuz, affecting global energy supply.

Key Points for Prelims

- Iran denies pursuing nuclear weapons; asserts right to peaceful nuclear energy.
- U.S. demands complete halt to nuclear weapon capability.
- Reference: 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – allowed limited enrichment under monitoring.
- Region impacted: Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Gulf countries.
- Strategic chokepoint: Strait of Hormuz handles ~1/5th of global oil trade.

Key Points for Mains

- Persistent trust deficit between U.S. and Iran.
- Failure of bilateral negotiations despite ongoing conflict.
- Impact on global energy security and oil prices.
- Regional instability involving Israel and Hezbollah.
- Weakening of multilateral diplomacy frameworks (JCPOA collapse).

Static Linkages

- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT):
  - Allows peaceful nuclear use under safeguards.
- Role of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA):
  - निरीक्षण एवं सत्यापन (monitoring nuclear activities).
- Strategic importance of chokepoints (Hormuz, Malacca, Suez).
- Energy security and dependence on West Asia (India imports ~60% crude from region – Economic Survey).

Critical Analysis

Issues

- U.S.: Non-proliferation vs. Iran: sovereign rights
- Collapse of diplomacy → rise in military escalation
- Global oil price volatility

Implications for India

- Threat to energy imports
- Impact on Indian diaspora in Gulf
- Balancing relations (U.S.–Iran–Israel triangle)

Way Forward

- Revive multilateral framework like JCPOA
- Confidence-building measures (CBMs)
- Stronger IAEA monitoring
- Diversification of energy sources (India)
- Promote diplomatic engagement via neutral mediators

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

Delimitation, and not women's reservation, is the issue

The Prime Minister is making appeals to Opposition parties to support Bills that the government wants to bulldoze in a special session of Parliament when the election campaign in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal will be at its peak. There can be only one reason for the extraordinary hurry, which is to derive political advantage and place the Opposition on the defensive.

The Prime Minister is, as usual, being economical with the truth.

The Parliament passed the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023 unanimously in September 2023 during a special session. The Adhiniyam introduced Article 334-A in the Constitution which mandated one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas, scheduled to come into effect after the completion of the next Census and the Census-based delimitation process. The Opposition had not asked for this condition. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Shri Mallikarjun Kharge, had forcefully demanded that the reservation provision be implemented from the 2024 Lok Sabha elections itself. For reasons best known to itself, the government did not agree.

Now, we are given to understand that Article 334-A will be amended to make women's reservation applicable from 2029 itself. Why did it take the Prime Minister 30 months to make his U-turn? And why can he not wait a few weeks to convene the special session? Opposition leaders have written to the government not once but thrice requesting that an all-party meeting be convened after the last phase of elections is over in West Bengal on April 29, to discuss what the new proposals of the government are. But that perfectly reasonable request has been turned down. Instead, the Prime Minister has resorted to writing op-eds, making appeals to political parties, and organising *sammelans*. It is an underhand tactic that reflects the Prime Minister's one-upmanship and his 'my way or the highway" approach to decision-making.

Lessons from the past

Contrast this with the manner in which the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Bills were finally passed by Parliament in April 1993 and June 1993, respectively. The Bills took almost five years of discussion and debate, following which reservation for women in elections to panchayats and *nagarpalikas* became law. This was a singular achievement of the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Today, there are about 15 lakh elected women representatives in rural and urban local bodies, constituting over 40% of the total. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023 stands on the shoulders of this achievement.

The last decadal Census was due in 2021. The Modi government kept postponing it. One consequence of this has been that over 10 crore people have been deprived of their legal entitlements under the National Food Security Act, 2013 that provides the basis for the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana. Census operations have begun only after an inexplicable delay of five years. It is being proudly claimed that it is a digital Census. Senior official have themselves publicly declared that because of its digital nature, most of the population enumeration numbers will be available in 2027 itself. The government's excuses for its tearing hurry to call this session and conduct delimitation are evidently hollow.

Almost exactly a year ago, the Prime Minister announced that the 2027 Census would also be a caste census. This was after filing affidavits in the Supreme Court and answering questions in Parliament rejecting the idea of conducting a caste census. This was also after the Prime Minister accused Congress leaders calling for a caste census as suffering from what he called "an urban naxal mindset". Be that as it may, Census 2027 is supposed to enumerate the population by caste in order to give greater meaning to social justice and empowerment. Bihar and Telangana have carried out comprehensive caste surveys in their respective States, with the whole process not taking more than six months.

It is clear, therefore, that the propaganda that a caste census will delay the publication of the Census 2027 is just not true. In fact, the Prime Minister's real intention now is to further delay and derail the caste census.

The special session is scheduled to begin on April 16. Yet till now, there has been no official proposal shared with MPs on what exactly the government wants the session to consider. It appears that some formula for delimitation is being suggested. Any delimitation must be preceded by a Census exercise as in the past. And it goes without saying that any delimitation involving an increase in the strength of the Lok Sabha must be politically – and not just arithmetically – equitable. States that have been pioneers in family planning, and smaller States, must not be placed at an absolute or relative disadvantage.

A proportionate increase may, in fact, result in the loss of relative influence because the difference in absolute numbers get magnified.

Need for careful consideration

The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023 provides for reservation within reservation. This means that the one-third of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes respectively will also be reserved for women.

During the debate in September 2023, the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha had demanded that a similar reservation be also provided for women belonging to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Reservation for OBCs has been already provided for in higher education and government employment.

The monsoon session of Parliament will begin in mid-July. The heavens will not fall if the government were to call an all-party meeting after April 29, to discuss its proposals with the Opposition, allowing time for a public debate, and then have the Constitution Amendment Bills considered in the monsoon session. There is simply no justification, except narrative management during troubled times, for this tearing hurry to bulldoze extremely far-reaching changes to our polity. The process is deeply flawed and anti-democratic. Reservation for women is not the issue here. That has already been settled. The real issue is delimitation which, based on the information unofficially available, is extremely dangerous and an assault on the Constitution itself.

Sonia Gandhi

Chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party

Any delimitation involving an increase in the strength of the Lok Sabha must be politically – and not just arithmetically – equitable

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Government plans a special session of Parliament (April 2026) amid ongoing elections.
- Likely move to amend Article 334-A to operationalise women's reservation earlier (around 2029).
- The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023 already provides 33% reservation, but its implementation is conditional on Census and delimitation.
- Concerns raised regarding:
  - Delay in Census (due since 2021)
  - Possible delimitation exercise
  - Lack of consultation with Opposition

Key Points

- Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023
  - Provides 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
  - Includes reservation within reservation for SC/ST women.
  - Linked to post-Census delimitation exercise.
- Article 334-A
  - Introduced via the Act.
  - Mandates implementation only after:
    - First Census post-enactment
    - Subsequent delimitation
- Census Delay
  - Last Census due in 2021, delayed significantly.
  - Expected digital Census with provisional data availability by 2027.
- Delimitation Concerns
  - Redistribution of seats based on population.
  - May increase representation of high-population states.
  - Could reduce relative political weight of southern and smaller states.
- Caste Census Debate
  - Government earlier opposed but later indicated inclusion in Census 2027.
  - Seen as linked to social justice and policy targeting.

Static Linkages

- Constitutional amendment → Special majority (Article 368)
- Women reservation → Article 15(3) enabling affirmative action
- Delimitation → Conducted by Delimitation Commission (independent body)
- Freeze on delimitation → Extended till 2026 (42nd Amendment)
- Census → Census Act, 1948
- Local body reservation → 73rd & 74th Amendments

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Promotes gender equality in political representation
- Strengthens inclusive democracy
- Builds on success of local body reservations

Issues

- Delayed implementation reduces effectiveness
- Linking with delimitation creates uncertainty
- No OBC sub-quota within women reservation
- Federal imbalance risk due to population-based seat redistribution
- Lack of consensus-building

Way Forward

- Conduct early and transparent Census
- Ensure time-bound implementation
- Provide OBC reservation within women quota
- Maintain federal balance in delimitation
- Promote consultative legislative process

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

Why India's established elite is afraid of taking risks

In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned*, Anthony Patch possesses everything except the willingness to act. He has education, social connections, and even reasonable intelligence. What destroys him is not external circumstance but internal paralysis. He spends years waiting for his grandfather's inheritance, and by the time it arrives, he has forgotten how to exercise agency. The money comes, but the man capable of using it meaningfully no longer exists. While this might seem like a distant literary tragedy, versions of it are unfolding across India's business elite today.

Something unusual has been happening in Indian business over the past few years. Well-managed family businesses with healthy cash flows are being sold not because they face distress or strategic dead ends, but because the next generation prefers liquidity over operational continuity. VIP Industries, a leading player in the Indian branded luggage market, is one example.

What makes this pattern strange is that these exits are happening during a period of unprecedented opportunity. India's domestic market is expanding, global supply chains are diversifying, and capital is abundant. Yet many second- and third-generation business families seem to be choosing passive investment avenues, such as running family offices, over the businesses their parents built, even though these generations are better educated and more globally networked than their predecessors. Why are they choosing not to build?

Preservation over creation

Peter Turchin's theory of elite overproduction offers one lens for understanding this. He argues that societies become unstable when they produce more credentialed elite aspirants than the number of elite positions available. The usual result is political instability as the surplus elites challenge the incumbents for power. But India seems to be generating a different outcome. While there is clearly an oversupply of educated, well-connected individuals relative to the number of influential positions, rather than triggering open conflict or displacement, what the country is seeing is a risk retreat among incumbents.

Existing business families are not being forced out. They are choosing custodianship over creation. Capital gets recycled into assets that preserve wealth, rather than create it, such as real estate portfolios, financial market positions, and established brands. Succession planning becomes about maintaining control, and not about expanding the frontier of what the family enterprise does. The result is stasis rather than revolution. India has surplus elite capacity, but that capacity is not being channelled into high-risk, long-gestation ventures. It is being absorbed into wealth preservation.

Kiran Mahasuar

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The inherited elite, the people who control the most capital and have the most institutional access, are opting out of the riskiest, and most transformational kinds of building

The R&D problem

Consider how India's private sector approaches Research and Development (R&D). As a percentage of revenue, Indian companies spend dramatically less on R&D than their counterparts in China, South Korea, or Taiwan. This is not because Indian firms are less profitable or because the regulatory environment makes R&D impossible. The issue seems to be that R&D represents exactly the kind of risk that second-generation business families find unattractive. It requires patient capital; and results are uncertain. Failures are visible and cannot be easily explained to minority shareholders accustomed to steady dividends. The payoff, if it comes, arrives years later and may benefit successors rather than the decision-maker. By contrast, acquiring an existing brand, expanding into real estate, or optimising an inherited manufacturing process offers more legible returns with less reputational exposure. The anomaly becomes clearer when you compare today's business elite with first-generation entrepreneurs. When Dhirubhai Ambani built the Patalganga refinery, he was betting everything on an outcome that was far from certain. The investment could not be quickly reversed, and failure would have been total and public. But that irreversibility was precisely what made the bet transformational. India's pivot to a market-oriented economy is interspersed with many such stories of first-generation entrepreneurs taking risky bets. So, what changed in the last two decades or so?

One hypothesis is that for someone inheriting a successful business, the calculation reverses. Risk is no longer the source of differentiation. It is a threat to something already secured. Moreover, there are more avenues for being a passive investor, such as a venture capitalist or a limited partner. Then, how can India's private sector be incentivised to invest in R&D?

Oswald Spengler made a distinction that feels relevant here, though he was writing about civilisational cycles rather than emerging economies. He argued that societies move from what he called 'culture' to 'civilisation'. Culture is rooted, productive, and comfortable with risk because it is still building foundational institutions. Civilisation is abstract, financial, and focused on administering and extracting value from what already exists. The pattern he describes maps uncomfortably well onto what is happening among India's urban business elite. Increasingly, wealth is held by people who think like portfolio managers rather than operators. Their assets are internationally diversified. Their downside is cushioned by family networks and political connections. They sell, diversify, and preserve. However, the aggregate outcome is a business elite that no longer behaves like it has skin in the game over generational time horizons.

India's dilemma

The problem is not that India lacks entrepreneurs. First-generation founders are still emerging and taking risks. The problem is that the inherited elite, the people who control the most capital and have the most institutional access, are opting out of the riskiest, and most transformational kinds of building. Anthony Patch's tragedy was that his inheritance arrived after he had lost the capacity to use it. India now has an inheritance class that receives wealth and position early enough to use it, but chooses not to, because the social structures that would make risk-taking rational have been replaced by ones that make waiting and selling more attractive.

The question, then, is not whether India has capital. The question is whether the people who control that capital still see themselves as builders of something larger than their own portfolio returns. And if they do not, what does that mean for the kind of economy India becomes over the next several decades?

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Increasing trend of sale of well-performing family businesses by second/third-generation owners despite favorable economic conditions.
- Shift from entrepreneurship (wealth creation) to passive investment (wealth preservation).
- Occurring during a period of high economic growth, supply chain diversification, and capital availability.
- Associated with low private sector R&D investment and declining risk appetite.

Key Points

- Behavioral Shift
  - From "builders" → "portfolio managers"
  - Preference for low-risk, short-term returns
- Elite Overproduction (Peter Turchin)
  - Excess educated elites → risk aversion instead of competition
- R&D Concern
  - India's GERD ~0.7% of GDP; private share low (Economic Survey)
  - Developed economies invest significantly higher
- Economic Implication
  - Capital available but not deployed in productive sectors
  - Risk of innovation deficit and slow structural transformation
- Comparison
  - First-generation entrepreneurs: high-risk, long-term investments
  - Later generations: capital preservation mindset

Static Linkages

- Economic development depends on entrepreneurship and innovation
- Capital formation and investment multiplier
- Schumpeter: innovation as driver of growth
- Role of private sector in industrialization
- Demographic dividend and productive utilization
- Economic Survey: R&D and innovation ecosystem
- NITI Aayog: Innovation-led growth strategy

Critical Analysis

Pros

- Financial stability and diversification
- Growth of financial markets

Cons

- Decline in entrepreneurial risk-taking
- Low innovation and R&D
- Misallocation of capital
- Weak global competitiveness

Challenges

- Short-term profit orientation
- Weak R&D incentives
- Cultural shift toward risk aversion

Way Forward

- Enhance R&D incentives (tax + subsidies)
- Promote patient capital (VC/PE, sovereign funds)
- Strengthen startup–industry linkages
- Encourage long-term corporate governance reforms
- Improve ease of doing business for innovation sectors

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

Elusive deal

U.S. and Iran must continue diplomatic efforts to end the war

Twenty-one hours of talks in Islamabad between the U.S. and Iran ended without a breakthrough. That no agreement emerged from the first post-ceasefire meeting is not surprising. Nor does it mean that the process has collapsed. Even before the talks began, it was evident that there were huge gaps between the two sides. The two-week ceasefire announced by U.S. President Donald Trump on April 8, after 39 days of war, looked shaky from day one as Israel stepped up air strikes on Lebanon, killing hundreds. Both Iran, and Pakistan, which mediated the truce, claimed that Lebanon was covered by the ceasefire, while Israel wants to continue the war. There was no mutually agreed framework for the Islamabad talks either. Iran claimed that its 10-point proposal was accepted as the basis for discussion, while the White House said that the ten points that it received were different from those in the proposal that Tehran had released. Despite differences, the meeting between U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance and the Iranian delegation headed by Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the first face-to-face senior-level meeting between the two sides since the 1979 revolution, marked significant progress.

According to Mr. Vance and Iranian officials, three issues remain contentious – Iran's nuclear programme, its control over the Strait of Hormuz, and Israeli strikes on Lebanon. Notably, Iran was willing to make a deal on its nuclear programme, the strait was fully open, and the Lebanon situation had not escalated into a full-scale ground invasion before the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Iran on February 28. U.S.-Israeli bombings have not met their stated objectives. On the contrary, the war has hardened Iran's position and triggered a whole new crisis over the Strait of Hormuz. Mr. Trump, who unilaterally sabotaged the Obama-era Iran nuclear deal in 2018, should not have started this war. But now that the war has turned out to be a strategic setback for the U.S. and its regional allies, Washington must focus on a negotiated settlement without ultimatums. Iran, for its part, realises that it holds significant leverage, but it should avoid overplaying its hand. Tehran needs credible security guarantees against future aggression and support for reconstruction, while the wanton Israeli killings in Lebanon must end. At the same time, Iran should be open to concessions on the nuclear front and to fully reopening the Strait of Hormuz to global traffic. The Islamabad meeting could be a starting point, if both sides sustain dialogue while holding the ceasefire.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- 21-hour talks between the U.S. and Iran in Islamabad ended without agreement but dialogue continues.
- Talks followed a fragile ceasefire announced by Donald Trump after prolonged conflict in West Asia.
- First high-level direct interaction since the Iranian Revolution.
- Pakistan acted as mediator.

Key Points

- Three major contentious issues:Iran's nuclear programme
- Control over the Strait of Hormuz
- Israeli military actions in Lebanon
- Strategic developments:Iran signaled willingness for negotiation on nuclear matters.
- Strait of Hormuz remains operational but is geopolitically sensitive.
- Conflict escalation linked to U.S.-Israeli military actions (Feb 28).
- Diplomatic contradictions:Iran's 10-point proposal vs U.S. claims of inconsistencies.
- Lack of a mutually agreed negotiation framework.
- Geopolitical implications:War hardened Iran's stance instead of weakening it.
- Raised concerns over global energy security due to Hormuz tensions.

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman; ~20% of global petroleum passes through it (Energy Information Administration).
- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) aims to prevent spread of nuclear weapons and promote peaceful use of nuclear energy.
- West Asia is a key geopolitical region due to energy resources and strategic chokepoints.
- Ceasefire diplomacy is part of conflict resolution under international relations principles.
- Role of third-party mediation in international conflicts (e.g., Oslo Accords, Camp David).

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Diplomatic engagement reduces chances of escalation.
- First direct talks since 1979 → confidence-building step.
- Scope for revival of nuclear deal framework.

Challenges

- Deep mistrust due to past U.S. withdrawal (2018).
- Ongoing regional conflicts (Israel–Lebanon axis).
- Risk to global oil supply via Hormuz.
- Absence of structured negotiation framework.

Way Forward

- Institutionalise dialogue with clear framework.
- Gradual revival of nuclear agreement with safeguards.
- Ensure stability in Strait of Hormuz (global commons).
- Promote multilateral mediation (UN involvement).
- Balance security concerns with diplomatic solutions.

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

Tourism and trade

Consensus is vital in leveraging the strategic importance of Nicobar

The Union government's ₹92,000 crore mega-infrastructure project for the holistic development of the Great Nicobar Island (GNI) by building it up as a port and tourism-led economy has gathered speed in the last six months, even as concerns remain about its impact on the Island's ecology and the rights of local populations, the Nicobarese and the Shompen – two indigenous tribal groups. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration has notified a draft master plan for the project. Apart from the International Container Transhipment Port (ICTP), the airport, and power plants, the draft master plan envisions developing the GNI as a "seaside destination in a pristine, unspoilt, protected environment", outlining plans for business, adventure, biodiversity tourism, family entertainment, amusement parks, etc., along with adequate social infrastructure for healthcare, education, and livelihood. The draft is planned for a projected population of over 3.36 lakh by 2055, by which time the expected tourist inflow will be a million a year. Over 70% of the direct employment the government hopes to create will be in tourism and allied sectors. The current population of the GNI is a little less than 10,000. This transformation of the GNI, aided by the ICTP, is crucial to leverage the "strategic importance" of the Island's location at the western entrance to the Malacca Strait. The draft plan has said the port will help India achieve its "aims to capture a significant share in global sea trade".

But while the administration has sought public suggestions and objections for 30 days, it remains unclear till when this window will remain open, given that the draft does not mention when it was notified. This draft plan follows another draft plan to relocate local Nicobarese communities to make way for the project. The two plans seemingly contradict each other with regard to where existing populations may be relocated, which has renewed fears among these groups. These communities have been opposing the project's clearance since 2022, alleging that their forest rights had not been settled. While the National Green Tribunal has set aside concerns about the project's impact on the GNI's biodiversity by citing its "strategic importance", a challenge to the project's clearances remains in the Calcutta High Court. Some have also questioned the project's commercial and naval merits. Considering that the project aims to irreversibly alter the demography, and ecology of the GNI, the most prudent path for the government is to take the time needed to build a more holistic consensus over it.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- The Union Government is expediting a ₹92,000 crore mega infrastructure project on Great Nicobar Island.
- A draft master plan has been released by the Andaman & Nicobar Administration.
- The project aims to develop the island into a strategic port-led and tourism-driven hub.
- Major components:
  - International Container Transhipment Port (ICTP)
  - Greenfield airport
  - Power infrastructure
  - Tourism ecosystem
- Target transformation:
  - Population: ~10,000 → 3.36 lakh by 2055
  - Tourist inflow: ~1 million/year

Key Points

- Location advantage: Near Malacca Strait (critical global shipping route).
- Objective: Increase India's share in global maritime trade.
- Employment: >70% jobs expected in tourism & allied sectors.
- Indigenous communities:
  - Nicobarese (ST)
  - Shompen (PVTG)
- Issues raised:
  - Incomplete forest rights settlement
  - Contradictory rehabilitation plans
- Legal status:
  - National Green Tribunal upheld clearance citing strategic importance
  - Case pending in Calcutta High Court
- Environmental concern: Impact on tropical forests, biodiversity, and coastal ecosystems

Static Linkages

- Malacca Strait → key global maritime chokepoint (~25% trade)
- Concept of transshipment ports (hub-and-spoke model)
- Forest Rights Act, 2006 → recognition of tribal land rights
- PVTGs → vulnerable, isolated, low population growth
- EIA Notification (2006) → environmental clearance process
- Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) norms
- Island ecosystems → high biodiversity, ecological fragility
- SAGAR doctrine → maritime security strategy

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Enhances India's maritime competitiveness
- Strategic foothold in Indo-Pacific region
- Reduces dependence on foreign transshipment hubs
- Boosts regional development and connectivity

Concerns

- Threat to fragile biodiversity and ecosystems
- Risk of cultural and livelihood loss for tribals
- Massive demographic change
- Weak consultation & transparency
- Possible dilution of Forest Rights Act protections

Core Issue

- Development vs Environment vs Tribal Rights

Way Forward

- Ensure Forest Rights Act compliance before execution
- Guarantee Free, Prior, Informed Consent (FPIC) of tribals
- Strengthen EIA with cumulative impact assessment
- Promote sustainable and low-impact tourism
- Transparent and extended public consultation
- Balance strategic interests with ecological sustainability

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

Dear Babasaheb, those who sing paeans to you inflict wounds on your Constitution

SUHAS PALSHIKAR

DEAR BABASAHEB, your life and thinking were deeply invested in larger ideas of equality, fraternity and a just society. But one must routinely go back to your contribution to the making of the Constitution, because, won't these goals remain distant and vague if we were to isolate them from the distortions of the Constitution that you shaped?

But your Constitution has become unrecognisable if not almost irrelevant amid bad practices and clever distortions. You were prescient when you warned that the Constitution would fail, not because it was not well crafted but because the people entrusted to work on it choose to make it a failure. This is not a lament about the document or a legal edifice, this is an immediate concern for the larger project you envisaged. Emancipation — and politics for emancipation — cannot be possible without the minimum of formal democracy. In undermining the Constitution, India's rulers are pushing back against the impulse of emancipation. In the wounds inflicted on the Constitution, there is a story foretold: The basics of political emancipation are denied, delegitimised, and the idea of democratic resistance criminalised.

Three specific instances that make this story of urgent concern may be cited as these are directly connected to the Constitution. These instances are happening when formality will demand that those who inflict wounds on your Constitution also sing paeans to your greatness.

Babasaheb, your followers associate the ambition of one person-one vote-one value with you and the Constitution. You were rightly concerned with expanding the ambit of democracy beyond the political; you warned that political democracy would be meaningless without social democracy. But we have managed to scuttle the basics themselves. If political democracy is constrained, legally and judicially reshaped to exclude, then the idea of social democracy will automatically become more distant and less relevant. The history of elections the world over is the history of expanding voting rights and the struggle for inclusion. We have made history by doing the opposite. Only a quarter of a century ago, India prided itself on the fact that its political parties and official election machinery strove to expand the net of inclusion. Today, we witness not merely the attrition of electoral rolls and allegations of systematic exclusion of minorities, we also witness judicial equivocation over this scandalous development.

As you would know, the betrayal is not confined to one institution. The Constitution envisaged a delicate balance of power that was supposed to be quite uncomfortable for the executive. The executive always wants power. But the Constitution expected institutions to function autonomously and countervail the power of the executive. Sometimes that really did happen — when, despite a parliamentary system, the legislature sought to ask tough questions; when, despite appointment by the executive, the Election Commission made life miserable for not just the executive but for most political parties; and when, in spite of the ignominy of ADM Jabalpur (2017), many high courts and sometimes the Supreme Court assured us that arrests cannot be arbitrary, imprisonment cannot be unreasonable.

So, we went on quoting your statement that Article 32 is the heart and soul of the Constitution. Little did we know that sedition charges would overpower all other considerations and "bail, not jail" would become mere poetry. Nor did we know that writ petitions would be kept undecided indeterminately. Heart and soul, Babasaheb, means something so central that there is no compromise, no delay, no subterfuge over it. Article 32 was supposed to be a strong counterbalance to executive excess. But this understanding has now become purely fictional.

If the heart and soul of the Constitution can be robbed of its strength and starring role, we are not too far away from the time when nothing in the Constitution is treated as sacrosanct. If the heart and soul of the Constitution can be diminished, then most other limbs of the Constitution that make the animal called democracy stand upright can be chopped off. Over the past 75 years, the Constitution evolved into a solid framework against arbitrary changes by a majority. That was possible because of the introduction of Basic Structure as a theoretical protection against executive and legislative takeover. But aren't we on the threshold of terminating that protection? We have already discarded it *de facto*; we now await a *de jure* denouement.

> Article 32 was supposed to be a strong counterbalance to executive excess. But this understanding has now become purely fictional

You may think these are exaggerated fears. But unfortunately, Babasaheb, this is not the case — only recently, we have witnessed a direct attack on you and your ideas about the Constitution. While there have been alleged disenfranchisement and alleged judicial abdications in matters of habeas corpus, the realm of ideas and theories, too, is being regularly cleansed of the democratic principles that once marked political and constitutional thinking. Your old-fashioned idea of constitutional morality is already being discarded as mere sentiment, a vague term.

Traditional political theory understood the importance of constitutionalism as the bulwark of constitutional democracy. Without it, the Constitution is a mere document that rulers and political players can distort. You gave that idea of constitutionalism a more elegant name — a normative basis that protects and enhances principles as something mandatory. When a government gives up on that normative anchor, the Constitution, however well written, becomes a convenient tool of obfuscation at best, and suppression at worst. And you will agree, Babasaheb, that when political democracy is compromised, we are one step away from denying democracy more generally.

The writer, based in Pune, taught Political Science

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Concerns raised regarding erosion of constitutional values and democratic functioning in India.
- Highlights issues such as institutional imbalance, electoral concerns, and weakening of constitutional safeguards.
- Reiterates the warning of B. R. Ambedkar that the success of the Constitution depends on its implementation.

Key Points

- Democracy & RepresentationAllegations of exclusion from electoral rolls.
- Weakening of inclusive democratic principle (one vote, one value).
- Institutional FrameworkImbalance in Executive–Legislature–Judiciary relations.
- Declining autonomy of constitutional bodies.
- JudiciaryDelays in writ petitions and constitutional cases.
- Concerns over dilution of "bail, not jail" principle.
- Article 32Core safeguard for enforcement of Fundamental Rights.
- Perceived weakening reduces citizen protection.
- Basic Structure DoctrineSafeguard against arbitrary constitutional amendments.
- Concerns over indirect weakening.
- Constitutional MoralityDecline in adherence to democratic norms and values.

Static Linkages

- Rule of Law
- Separation of Powers
- Judicial Review & Writ Jurisdiction
- Fundamental Rights (Articles 12–35)
- Basic Structure Doctrine (Kesavananda Bharati, 1973)
- Free and Fair Elections
- Constitutional Morality

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Strong constitutional framework.
- Judicial review acts as safeguard.
- Regular elections ensure continuity of democracy.

Challenges

- Institutional weakening and executive dominance.
- Judicial delays affecting rights enforcement.
- Electoral integrity concerns.
- Declining constitutional morality.

Way Forward

- Strengthen institutional independence.
- Ensure timely judicial remedies.
- Improve electoral transparency.
- Promote constitutional values through governance.
- Reinforce checks and balances.

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

To reimagine justice, begin with rebuilding the courthouse

SIDDARTH RAO ERRABELLI

THE ANNOUNCEMENTS of new high court complexes in Assam, Maharashtra and Telangana present a significant opportunity to reimagine what courts should look like in a rapidly changing India. They also offer an opportunity to think afresh about better design and architecture of courthouses, which can, in turn, improve case pendency and litigants' perceptions of justice.

The grandiose architecture of India's courts was conceived in colonial times to reinforce the hierarchical relationship between the state and its subjects. They were built at a time when courts had a small fraction of today's case load. The Supreme Court, for instance, had 14 judges and 2,656 pending cases in 1960. Today, it has 86,000 cases and 34 sanctioned judges. High courts together have 6.3 million pending cases, while over 46 million cases are pending in the lower courts.

Meeting this high case load has required space, resulting in a haphazard expansion of court spaces. Such retrofitting leads to what the legal scholar Patricia Branco terms "judicial slumisation" — a built environment in which lawyers and visitors have to elbow through teeming, long-winding corridors and aisles to get into courtrooms. They strain to hear the queries of the judge, and must speak loudly enough to ensure that their voice carries across overcrowded rooms with bad acoustics. A more welcoming court complex would make litigants and victims of crime feel that they were received and heard better, improving perceptions of justice delivery.

The physical spaces, if designed well, could create an enabling environment for all stakeholders of the justice system — judges, lawyers, litigants, and the court registry staff. It can contribute towards improving the disposal rates of cases. Indian courts operate on a docket system, where cases are called based on a serial number order rather than at a fixed time. Lawyers might have more than one matter in different courts on a given day and are often unable to move fast enough between courts when they have clashing hearings. This derails the serial order and work flow of judges, sometimes delaying the case for days. It is no wonder, then, that junior lawyers are first trained to seek "pass-overs" and argue in "proxy" while their seniors juggle appearances between courts. A better integrated complex can obviate these difficulties.

The barriers in court complexes start right from overcrowded parking spaces that delay admission into the court complex. Access to courts is oftentimes not conducive for persons with special needs. The lack of space has led to incongruous situations where high courts pass orders under the Maternity Benefit Act 1961, while many of them do not have crèches mandated under the very same act.

When the United States went through a reconstruction of its court buildings after the New Deal in the 1930s, and Japan rebuilt the Tokyo District Court in the "bubble era" of its economic prosperity in the 1980s, both countries devised design guidelines for courtroom construction. India, too, must seek out experts in the field to architecturally re-imagine court complexes outside of their colonial legacy, centring them around all stakeholders, and not just around the sanctioned strength of judges.

Inspiration could also be drawn from the citizen-centric Constitutional Court of South Africa, the High Court of Australia, and the Kununurra courthouse in north-western Australia, which seek to blend in with and reflect the values of the local community.

The National Case Management System (NCMS) 2024 recognised that court infrastructure must also be augmented and improved to meet the needs of litigants, lawyers, judges, and court staff. However, the NCMS constituted a sub-committee on Court Development Planning System (Infrastructure & Budgeting), which focuses only on model plans for district courts and *taluka* court complexes, while overlooking the reconstruction of high courts and integrated court complexes.

As more states move to rebuild overburdened high courts, the lack of guidelines could result in poorly designed courthouses that create more problems than they resolve.

The writer is visiting researcher at Harvard Law School, Massachusetts, US. He is studying the relationship between courthouse architecture and judicial efficacy

The barriers in court complexes start right from overcrowded parking spaces that delay admission into the court complex. Access to courts is oftentimes not conducive for persons with special needs

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Assam, Maharashtra and Telangana have initiated plans to revamp court infrastructure amid rising pendency.
- India faces severe judicial backlog:
  - ~86,000 cases in Supreme Court
  - ~6.3 million in High Courts
  - ~46 million in subordinate courts (NJDG data).
- Existing court complexes are largely colonial-era designs, unsuitable for present caseloads and citizen-centric justice delivery.
- NCMS 2024 highlights need for infrastructure reform but lacks a holistic framework for higher judiciary.

Key Points

- Judicial Infrastructure Crisis: Overcrowded courts, poor acoustics, lack of basic facilities.
- "Judicial Slumisation": Congested and inefficient court spaces affecting proceedings.
- Case Management Issue: Docket-based system (serial listing) causes delays.
- Access Barriers:
  - Inadequate parking and entry systems
  - Poor accessibility for PwDs
  - Lack of gender-sensitive facilities (e.g., crèches).
- Impact on Justice Delivery:
  - Delays in hearings and case disposal
  - Reduced litigant confidence
- Global Practices:
  - Standardised court design (USA, Japan)
  - Citizen-centric models (South Africa, Australia).
- Policy Gap: Absence of uniform national standards for court design, especially High Courts.

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to life includes access to justice.
- Article 39A – Equal justice and free legal aid.
- Basic Structure – Independence of judiciary.
- Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Judicial Infrastructure.
- E-Courts Mission Mode Project.
- Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (accessibility norms).

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Improved infrastructure → higher efficiency & faster disposal.
- Enhances ease of access to justice.
- Supports digital courts and e-governance reforms.

Challenges

- Lack of standardised guidelines → uneven development.
- High financial and administrative burden.
- Infrastructure alone cannot solve procedural delays.
- Risk of neglecting subordinate judiciary needs.

Way Forward

- Frame national model guidelines for court infrastructure.
- Develop integrated court complexes.
- Introduce time-based case listing system.
- Ensure universal accessibility & gender-sensitive facilities.
- Integrate technology (e-courts, virtual hearings).
- Strengthen Centre–State coordination in funding.

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

Why Iran energy shock hasn't spread to food, yet

In 2007-08, supply shortages along with diversion of crops towards biofuels, aggravated by financial speculation, drove up food prices

HARISH DAMODARAN

ON JULY 11, 2008, when Brent crude prices hit an all-time-high of $147.5 a barrel, the world experienced not just fuel inflation.

No less painful was global food inflation, which — based on the annual increase in the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Food Price Index (FPI) — ruled at double-digits for 22 months in a row from November 2006 to August 2008, averaging 34.8% for that period.

It was the same during the oil shock following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in late-February 2022. Brent crude went as high as $139.13 per barrel on March 7, 2022. Then too, elevated global oil prices were accompanied by double-digit inflation in the FAO index for 19 consecutive months from January 2021 to July 2022 and averaging 26.8% year-on-year.

It's different this time

The global energy shock from the United States-Israel versus Iran war has led to Brent prices soaring from an average of $64.6 per barrel in January and $69.2 in February to $98.2 in March 2026, peaking at $119.5 on March 9. With a fragile ceasefire since April 8 and the Strait of Hormuz still not open to most oil and gas traffic, Brent closed last week at $95.2 per barrel.

However, there is no concurrent spike in international food prices.

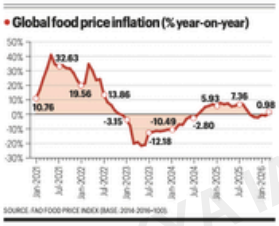
The FAO index (a weighted average of the world prices of a basket of food commodities over a base period value, taken at 100 for 2014-16) in March this year, at 128.5 points, was hardly 1% higher than for the same month last year. Annual FPI inflation has been negative or at low single-digits since September 2025, which contrasts with the high double-digit rates of 2021-22 (*see chart*).

This is also reflected in export prices of wheat shipped from Argentina, the European Union and Russia currently quoting at $230, $238 and $239 per tonne, as against their corresponding year-ago levels of $248, $247 and $254 respectively.

Exports of rice from India are similarly going at around $367 per tonne (compared with $372 a year ago), while falling even more from Thailand ($405 to $382) and Pakistan ($395 to $351). Export prices are similarly down for corn (maize) from Argentina ($219 to $209) and Ukraine ($240 to $227), and marginally up from the US ($214 to $217) and Brazil ($223 to $225).

Raw sugar prices in New York, too, are at 13.75 cents per pound, a sharp dip from 18.1 cents last year at this time. The FAO dairy price subindex in March was 18.7% below its level a year earlier.

Only edible oils have registered notable price increases in the recent period. Landed prices of crude palm oil imported into India are at $1,265 a tonne, higher than the average of $1,112 for April 2025. They are up for crude soyabean ($1,355 versus $1,107) and sunflower ($1,440 versus $1,219) oil as well.



Road ahead

There are two routes through which food prices can potentially harden in the months ahead

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The first is cost push. The second route is diversion of crops for biofuel

Why is it different now?

The primary factor is ample supplies on the back of record world production of wheat, corn, oilseeds and sugar, estimated at 844.2 million tonnes (mt), 1,301.1 mt, 698.2 mt and 189.3 mt respectively for 2025-26 by the US Department of Agriculture. Global ending stocks of rice for 2025-26 are also projected at an unprecedented high of 192.3 mt.

This wasn't the case in 2007-08, when a combination of supply shortages and increased diversion of crops such as sugarcane and maize towards biofuels — aggravated by financial speculation, with institutional investors putting big money into agricultural commodities that emerged as a distinct asset class like stocks and bonds — drove up international food prices.

These rose in tandem with crude prices; both peaked around March-July 2008 before collapsing with the bursting of the speculative bubble by October 2008.

In 2022 also, global food prices had begun firming up alongside crude from the previous year itself.

The driver was the post-Covid demand recovery with the easing of lockdowns. The Russia-Ukraine war only took both still higher. The FAO index scaled an all-time-high of 160.2 points in March 2022, the same month when Brent crude touched $139.13 per barrel.

Can food prices surge again like before?

That possibility cannot be ruled out, despite the FAO index averaging only 128.5 points in March and the world entering this crisis with abundant reserves of cereals, oilseeds and sugar. India, too, is well placed with respect to current stocks. It is set to harvest a bumper *rabi* (winter-spring) crop on top.

There are two routes through which food prices can potentially harden in the months ahead.

The first is cost push. The Iran war and closure of the critical Hormuz waterway have triggered not just an oil, but a full-fledged energy shock also impacting supplies of petrochemical feedstocks and intermediates that go into a host of industries, including fertilisers and crop protection chemicals.

According to World Bank data, average prices of urea (Middle East origin) and diammonium phosphate (shipped from US Gulf ports) were at $725.6 and $658.3 per tonne respectively in March 2026, higher than their corresponding rates of $394.5 and $615.1 for March 2025.

Constrained availability and high cost of fertilisers, herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and diesel could affect acreages and yields of the 2026-27 crops. In the US, corn plantings happen in April-May and that of soyabean in May-June. India's *kharif* (monsoon) sowings are mainly during mid-June to mid-August.

If the present ceasefire does not translate into a full re-opening of Hormuz, it may threaten the prospects for the upcoming agricultural season and, in turn, push up food prices.

The second route for food inflation is diversion of crops for biofuel. If crude prices stay high for long, there would be that much incentive to divert corn, rice or sugarcane for making ethanol that can be blended with petrol. Vegetable oils — palm, soyabean or rapeseed — can, likewise, be used to produce fatty acid methyl ester (FAME), a substitute for diesel.

One reason for palm oil prices going up, notwithstanding a record global production of 80.7 mt expected for 2025-26, is aggressive biofuel blending mandates by Indonesia. The world's largest palm oil producer had already raised the FAME content in its diesel from 35% to 40% since January 2025. It plans next to launch B50 — a blend containing 50% FAME and 50% normal diesel — from July this year. The Indonesian government has further issued a decree to make the B50 standard compulsory for all diesel sold nationwide by 2028.

It all eventually boils down to how long this energy supply crisis — the most significant since the 1970s — lasts.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The recent energy shock due to the US–Israel vs Iran conflict (2026) has led to a sharp rise in crude oil prices (Brent touching ~$119.5/barrel).
- Historically, such oil shocks (e.g., 2008 global crisis and 2022 Russia–Ukraine war) were accompanied by high global food inflation.
- However, unlike previous episodes, global food prices (FAO Food Price Index) have remained stable in 2026 despite rising energy costs.
- This divergence marks a structural shift in global agri-commodity dynamics.

Key Points

- Oil–Food Price Link Weakening (Short-term)In 2007–08: Food inflation averaged ~34.8% (FAO index).
- In 2021–22: Food inflation averaged ~26.8%.
- In 2026: Food inflation remains low/negative (~1%) despite oil surge.
- Abundant Global Food SupplyRecord production (2025–26 estimates):
  - Wheat: 844.2 million tonnes
  - Corn: 1,301.1 million tonnes
  - Oilseeds: 698.2 million tonnes
  - Sugar: 189.3 million tonnes
- Rice stocks at record 192.3 million tonnes.
- Declining Export Prices (Year-on-Year)Wheat, rice, maize, sugar: mostly lower than 2025 levels.
- Dairy prices down ~18.7% YoY.
- Only edible oils rising due to biofuel demand.

- Emerging Risks to Food PricesCost-push inflationFertiliser prices surged (e.g., urea ~$725 vs ~$394 last year).
- Higher diesel and agrochemical costs.
- Biofuel DiversionCrops diverted to ethanol & biodiesel (e.g., Indonesia's B40 → B50 policy).
- Supply Chain DisruptionsClosure of Strait of Hormuz affecting energy & fertiliser supply.

Static Linkages

- Demand-supply dynamics determine price levels in markets
- Cost-push vs demand-pull inflation
- Terms of trade in agriculture
- Buffer stocks and food security mechanisms
- Role of MSP and PDS in price stabilization
- Energy–agriculture nexus
- Biofuel policy and food vs fuel debate
- Global commodity cycles and speculative bubbles
- Role of institutions like FAO and World Bank

Critical Analysis

- Why inflation is low nowStrong global supply buffers
- Weak speculative pressures
- Stable export availability
- Why risks persistHigh fertiliser and diesel costs → lower future yields
- Biofuel diversion → reduced food supply
- Geopolitical risks → supply shocks
- India-specific dimensionComfortable stocks + bumper rabi crop
- Vulnerability in edible oil imports
- Fiscal pressure from fertiliser subsidies

Way Forward

- Promote domestic oilseed production (reduce import dependence)
- Expand nano-urea and alternative fertilisers
- Maintain adequate buffer stocks
- Calibrate biofuel blending targets
- Diversify energy sources (renewables)
- Strengthen global food supply coordination

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