

DAILY NEWSP APER ANALYSIS

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**CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

Truce with Iran holds despite fresh attacks: U.S.

Associated Press
DUBAI

U.S. military leaders said on Tuesday that a ceasefire with Iran remains in effect a day after Tehran was blamed for new attacks in the Strait of Hormuz and against the UAE.

The fragile truce, reached nearly a month ago, appeared to be holding as U.S. forces pressed ahead with efforts to reopen the vital waterway for global energy. On Monday, the U.S. said it sank six small Iranian boats that had threatened commercial ships. So far, only two merchant ships are known to have passed through a new U.S.-guarded route,



Rising defiance: A woman waves an Iranian flag in front of an anti-U.S. billboard at Valiasr Square in Tehran, on Tuesday. AP

with hundreds more bottled up in the Persian Gulf. The UAE, a key American ally, said it came under attack by Iranian missiles and drones for a second straight day on Tuesday. At least three people were

wounded in attacks the day before, and a drone sparked a fire at a key oil facility in Fujairah.

U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth and Gen. Dan Caine, the U.S. military's top officer, told a news

conference on Tuesday that Iran's renewed aggression hadn't reached the threshold of what Gen. Caine called "major combat operations". He said Tuesday marked a "quieter" day in the strait. "No, the ceasefire is not over," Mr. Hegseth said.

Iran has said the new effort does violate the ceasefire. Iran's Parliament Speaker and chief negotiator, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, accused the U.S. of undermining regional security. In a post on X, he signalled that Iran has yet to fully respond to the U.S. attempt to reopen the waterway. "We know full well that the continuation of the status quo is intoler-

able for America; while we have not even begun yet," he said.

Disputing Washington's claim of sinking six boats, an Iranian military commander said two small civilian cargo boats were hit on Monday, killing five civilians, state TV reported.

"Since the ceasefire was announced, Iran has fired at commercial vessels nine times and seized two container ships, and they've attacked U.S. forces more than 10 times - all below the threshold of restarting major combat operations at this point," Gen. Caine said.

MODI CONDEMNS ATTACKS
» PAGE 4

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Despite a ceasefire between Iran and the U.S., fresh attacks took place in the Strait of Hormuz and UAE oil facilities.
- The U.S. accused Iran of targeting commercial shipping and attacking the UAE through drones and missiles.
- UAE's Fujairah oil facility was attacked, injuring civilians including three Indians.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi condemned attacks on civilian infrastructure and expressed solidarity with the UAE.
- India called for "free and unimpeded navigation" through the Strait of Hormuz in accordance with international law.
- The incident has revived concerns regarding:
 - Global energy security
 - Maritime security
 - Stability in West Asia
 - Safety of Indian diaspora in Gulf countries

Key Points

Strait of Hormuz

- Located between Iran and Oman.
- Connects:
 - Persian Gulf
 - Gulf of Oman
 - Arabian Sea
- One of the world's most important oil chokepoints.
- Nearly one-fifth of global oil trade passes through it.

Importance for India

- India imports more than 80% of its crude oil needs.
- Large share of India's oil and LNG imports passes through the Strait of Hormuz.
- Around 10 million Indians live in Gulf countries.
- UAE hosts approximately 4.3 million Indians.
- Gulf remittances are crucial for India's economy.

India's Stand

- Supported peaceful resolution through dialogue and diplomacy.
- Condemned attacks on civilians and infrastructure.
- Emphasised freedom of navigation and maritime security.
- Maintained strategic balance without directly targeting any country.

Strategic Concerns

- Rising tensions may increase global crude oil prices.
- Threat to supply chains and global trade.
- Risk to Indian diaspora and energy security.
- Increased militarisation of West Asia affects Indian Ocean stability.

Static Linkages

- Strategic importance of maritime chokepoints.
- Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs).
- Energy security and economic stability.
- India's policy of strategic autonomy.
- UNCLOS and freedom of navigation.
- Diaspora as a factor in foreign policy.
- Maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Highlights importance of West Asia for India's:
 - Energy imports
 - Trade
 - Diaspora
 - Strategic interests
- Reinforces need for secure maritime routes.
- Demonstrates India's balanced diplomacy in a multipolar world.

Challenges

- Oil price volatility may worsen inflation and fiscal pressures.
- Disruption in Hormuz can affect India's energy supplies.
- Escalation may endanger Indian citizens in Gulf nations.
- Increasing regional instability may impact global economic recovery.

Way Forward

- Diversify energy import sources.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR).
- Strengthen maritime security cooperation.
- Enhance naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Promote diplomatic engagement in West Asia.
- Accelerate renewable energy transition for reduced import dependence.

Top court judge says PIL has become 'paisa interest litigation'

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court judge Tuesday said public interest litigation (PIL), a unique mechanism initiated by the Indian Judiciary post-Emergency to "bring social justice within the reach of the common man", has lately metamorphosed into "private interest litigation", "publicity interest litigation" and even "paisa" and "political" interest litigation.

The judge, who is part of a nine-judge Bench hearing the Sabarimala review petitions, said articles are being published in newspapers merely for the sake of filing PIL pleas. Justice Nagarathna's oral observations follow

submissions made by the Centre in the Sabarimala case to do away with PIL jurisdiction. "The time has come not merely to recalibrate PIL, but to remove it," the Centre had submitted through Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta.

One of the arguments raised by the Centre was about the locus standi of the original writ petitioner, Indian Young Lawyers Association. The NGO was the first to challenge the prohibition on women aged 10 to 50 from entering the Sabarimala temple.

The legal challenge, which dated back to 2006, culminated in a five-judge Bench upholding the right of women of all ages to enter and worship at the tem-



The Indian Young Lawyers Association first challenged the ban on women aged 10 to 50 from entering the temple. FILE PHOTO

ple. The September 2018 judgment, delivered by a Bench headed by then Chief Justice Dipak Misra (now retired), had compared the bar on women to the practice of untouchability.

However, on Tuesday, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant asked the NGO's lawyer, advocate Ravi Pra-

kash Gupta, what "business" his client had to question the temple prohibition.

Mr. Gupta submitted that the petition was triggered by news articles on a sex scandal involving a priest of the Sabarimala temple.

Chief Justice Kant asked how the question

of the prohibition on women of a certain age at the temple was in any way connected to the scandal involving the priest. The CJ said the apex court could instead have done better by taking suo motu cognizance of the allegations against the priest, ordering a day-to-day trial and ensuring that he was brought to justice if found guilty. The CJ said the Supreme Court should have thrown the association's writ petition into the "dustbin".

At one point, Chief Justice Kant asked whether there was a real difference between a meddler and a bona fide PIL petitioner. Mr. Gupta submitted

that PILs were not considered adversarial.

Rejecting the need for a review of the 2018 judgment, Mr. Gupta questioned the very reason given for the existence of the prohibition - that the presence of young women was anathema to the Sabarimala deity.

"They say the deity does not like the presence of young ladies... Is that said as an expression of regard towards the deity, or is it meant as an insult to the deity? Are they putting words in the mouth of Lord Ayyappa?" Mr. Gupta asked.

Justice B.V. Nagarathna interjected sharply, querying, "How are you concerned with all this, tell us? Is it in any way your business?"

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Supreme Court judges raised concerns over the misuse of Public Interest Litigation (PIL) during hearings in the Sabarimala Temple review petitions.
- Justice B.V. Nagarathna observed that PILs are increasingly turning into "private", "publicity", "political", and "paisa" interest litigations.
- The Union Government argued for reconsideration of PIL jurisdiction, citing misuse and judicial overreach.
- Questions were raised regarding the locus standi of the Indian Young Lawyers Association, which had challenged the restriction on women's entry into Sabarimala temple.
- The 2018 Supreme Court judgment had allowed entry of women of all age groups into Sabarimala, invoking equality and constitutional morality.

Key Points

- PIL is a judicial innovation developed after the Emergency period to ensure access to justice for marginalized groups.
- PIL relaxed the traditional rule of locus standi.
- Constitutional basis:
 - Article 32 – Supreme Court
 - Article 226 – High Courts
 - Article 39A – Equal justice and free legal aid
- Important contributors:
 - Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer
 - Justice P.N. Bhagwati
- Concerns highlighted by Supreme Court:
 - Frivolous PILs
 - Politically motivated litigation
 - Judicial time burden
 - Interference in governance and religious matters
- Sabarimala issue involves:
 - Article 14 – Equality
 - Article 15 – Non-discrimination
 - Article 25 – Freedom of religion

- Essential Religious Practices doctrine
- Constitutional morality vs religious customs

Static Linkages

- Judicial Activism and Judicial Restraint
- Separation of Powers
- Fundamental Rights
- Constitutional Morality
- Rule of Law
- Locus Standi
- Essential Religious Practices doctrine
- Access to Justice
- Judicial Review
- Basic Structure Doctrine

Critical Analysis

Importance of PIL

- Helped vulnerable sections access justice.
- Expanded scope of Article 21.
- Improved executive accountability.
- Played major role in environmental and human rights protection.

Issues in PIL

- Misuse for political or personal agendas.
- Increase in publicity-oriented litigation.
- Judicial overreach into executive domain.
- Delays in genuine cases.
- Burden on constitutional courts.

Constitutional Debate

- Balance between:
 - Individual rights
 - Religious freedom
 - Judicial intervention
 - Democratic accountability

Way Forward

- Strict scrutiny of PIL petitions.
- Penalties for frivolous PILs.
- Preserve PIL for genuine social justice issues.
- Develop clear guidelines on locus standi.
- Ensure balance between judicial activism and restraint.
- Fast-track disposal of genuine PIL matters.

Silencing academia, weakening democratic space

According to the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute 2026 report, India is still classified as an “electoral autocracy”, ranking in the lower half globally. The report notes a steady decline in democratic freedoms, especially in free expression, media independence, and civil society, placing India among the “worst autocracies”. This signals a growing dismantling of institutions and norms that support accountability and pluralism, drawing increasing international scrutiny.



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The Scholars at Risk Free to Think 2024 report classifies India as having “completely restricted” academic freedom. It cites declining university autonomy linked to rising political interference, and pressure on institutions. Notably, it emphasises the systematic enforcement of a Hindu nationalist agenda within higher education, with changes to curricula, limited scholarly exploration and reduced space for intellectual dissent.

This classification is not an isolated judgment. It aligns with a broader pattern of democratic erosion documented by global indices, from V-Dem to Freedom House. For Indian universities – once celebrated as arenas of critical thought and pluralistic debate – the message is unequivocal: the freedom to teach, to learn, and to question is no longer guaranteed.

What is less discussed is how shrinking academic freedom weakens democracy itself. Beyond elections, voting rights and fair, healthy and functioning democracy depends on a strong civil society, open access to evidence-based information, and space for genuine public debate – areas now under growing pressure, especially in academia.

These freedoms are under direct strain, most visibly in academia. Universities – meant to foster inquiry and debate – face funding cuts, regulatory pressure, and growing self-censorship, eroding their autonomy. The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill proposes to further centralise control, prioritising conformity over academic freedom. As these spaces shrink, so does society’s ability to think critically and sustain a pluralistic democracy.

A disturbing pattern
According to *The Wire*, 62 academics faced punitive action (2014-26) for their opinions or political stances. Freedom of expression is penalised on campuses using serious laws that define faculty as “government servants”. In *Nature* (April 2024), Yamini Aiyar cites an India Academic Freedom Network report that documents a series of disrupted events, arrests of faculty and students, and visa hurdles for foreign researchers.

Academic suppression and shrinking dissent signal a deep democratic decline in India

sharply narrowed. Data from 2024-26 show a broad assault on academic freedom, targeting students, researchers, and faculty. Driven by political pressure, institutional failures, and social biases, these trends signal that certain topics are off-limits, certain voices are dangerous, and the pursuit of knowledge must bow to political convenience.

A consistent and disturbing pattern emerges: institutions are accused of failing to act against perpetrators. Internal complaints committees, mandated to provide oversight and justice, are described by critics as “ornamental”, existing more for formal compliance than for substantive accountability. When the very bodies designed to protect students and faculty become complicit through silence or inaction, the chilling effect deepens. Trust erodes, fear takes root, and the message is unmistakable: power will be protected, and voices that challenge it will find no refuge within the walls meant to nurture free inquiry.

A worrying erosion
These actions undermine the ability of civil society and academic institutions to hold leaders accountable, eroding the very basis of a knowledge sector essential to Indian democracy. When violence goes unpunished, when caste and religious prejudice are replicated rather than challenged, when sexual predators are protected, and when dissent is criminalised, the message is unmistakable: the pursuit of knowledge must not disturb power.

India’s stance on political rights is reflected in its refusal to sign the First Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Although a party to the ICCPR treaty since 1979, it does not accept the UN complaint mechanism, meaning citizens cannot seek international redress for rights violations after exhausting domestic remedies.

The contrast is striking. India’s Constitution, through Articles 14, 19, and 21, guarantees many of the same rights enshrined in the ICCPR. The Supreme Court of India has often drawn upon international human rights norms to interpret and expand fundamental rights. Yet, the government remains unwilling to subject itself to the international complaint mechanism that would allow its own citizens – particularly those from marginalised communities who face disproportionate human rights violations – to seek justice beyond domestic courts when those courts fail them.

This issue is highlighted in an insightful article by Kavi Naik: “The Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam case: An international campaign within the realm of possibility” (*The Leaflet*, January 7, 2026). The young academic scholars, Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, have been in jail as undertrials for the last five years. On January 6, the Supreme Court rejected their bail application and barred them from applying for bail for a year, stunning many legal experts.

When journalists such as Irfan Mehraj and humanists such as Sonam Wangchuk (now released) struggle through prolonged legal battles, even for bail, some high-profile gnomes accused of serious crimes have repeatedly secured parole or furlough. The contrast could not be more telling. On one side, a voice for justice, dignity, and democratic rights is treated as a threat. On the other hand, figures accused of serious crimes are granted leniency. In this asymmetry lies a disturbing truth about whose freedoms are protected and whose are quietly abandoned.

The cost of homogenisation
Why does a self-proclaimed “Mother of Democracy” prefer homogenisation of thought rather than freedom of thought? Higher education institutions have always been refuges for those who challenge orthodox thinking and work toward generating new ideas.

This is not a bug but a feature of university life. Democracies are revitalised by such encounters, even when they mean questioning majority opinion.

History offers sobering evidence: authoritarianism does not always arrive with a crash. More often, it emerges from within democracies – slowly, quietly, and with the acquiescence of those it will eventually silence. It springs not from sudden rupture, but from the gradual conditioning of publics through manufactured victimhood, cultivated fear, and the steady erosion of norms that once seemed unshakable. In this process, citizens and institutions can become complicit in the dismantling of their own freedoms, unaware that the protections being stripped away were the very foundations of the democracy they took for granted.

The decline documented in the Academic Freedom Index is not an abstract metric. It is a measure of the health of Indian democracy itself. When dissent is criminalised, and when political interests capture academic institutions, the foundation upon which democratic accountability rests is systematically dismantled – brick by brick, case by case, silence by silence.

The members tell a story. However, the true story is developing on our campuses, where voices once raised in inquiry now whisper; in our courtrooms, where justice is increasingly influenced by power; and in the silence of those who once dared to speak, a silence that grows louder each day, while the state itself becomes more bureaucratic, punitive, and regulatory.

The key question is whether institutions will continue down this path or reclaim their original purpose. For society, it is whether we choose to protect the spaces that allow critical thinking, challenge power, and help young people engage meaningfully with issues of justice and governance.

- India is party to ICCPR (1979) but not to the First Optional Protocol.
- Democratic decline affects:
 - Civil society,
 - Media freedom,
 - Research ecosystem,
 - Global academic credibility.

Static Points

- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of speech and expression.
- Article 19(1)(c) – Freedom to form associations.
- Article 21 – Right to life and liberty.
- Article 51A(h) – Scientific temper and spirit of inquiry.
- Basic Structure Doctrine:
 - Democracy,
 - Rule of law,
 - Liberty.
- ICCPR and international human rights framework.
- Role of dissent in democracy.
- University autonomy in democratic governance.

Critical Analysis

Importance of Academic Freedom

- Encourages innovation and research.
- Strengthens democratic accountability.
- Promotes critical thinking.
- Supports evidence-based policymaking.

Concerns

- Centralisation may reduce autonomy.
- Fear of punishment may increase self-censorship.
- Politicisation of campuses affects neutrality.
- Weak dissent culture may weaken democracy.
- Restrictions can affect India’s global academic rankings.

Government Perspective

- Need to maintain:
 - Public order,
 - National security,
 - Social harmony.
- Regulation necessary to prevent:
 - Extremism,
 - Hate speech,
 - Campus violence.

Way Forward

- Ensure institutional autonomy of universities.
- Strengthen constitutional protection for free expression.
- Promote transparent university governance.
- Reduce excessive political interference.
- Encourage research and innovation ecosystem.
- Strengthen grievance redressal systems.
- Promote constitutional values and scientific temper.
- Balance national security with civil liberties.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- V-Dem Institute Report 2026 classified India as an “Electoral Autocracy”.
- Scholars at Risk “Free to Think 2024” report termed academic freedom in India as “completely restricted”.
- Concerns raised regarding:
 - Decline in university autonomy,
 - Restrictions on dissent,
 - Political interference in higher education,
 - Pressure on faculty, students, and researchers.
- Debate linked academic freedom with:
 - Constitutional democracy,
 - Civil liberties,
 - Institutional accountability.

Key Points

- Academic freedom includes:
 - Freedom to teach,
 - Conduct research,
 - Publish ideas,
 - Debate without fear.
- Universities are important for:
 - Scientific temper,
 - Constitutional morality,
 - Democratic culture,
 - Policy innovation.
- Reports highlighted:
 - Self-censorship in campuses,
 - Disruption of academic events,
 - Punitive action against scholars,
 - Weak institutional grievance mechanisms.

The Iran conflict and the future of Shia identity

The Iran war is not merely a geopolitical conflict; it is a crucible for the future of Shia identity. For nearly half a century, Shiism has been shaped by the Iranian revolutionary model – an assertive fusion of clerical authority, state power, and transnational political ambition. This conflict could disrupt, reinforce, or redesign that synthesis. The war may fragment Shia identity, pulling it back toward national forms. But it may equally consolidate and radicalise it, deepening a shared narrative of oppression and reviving its most powerful theological motifs – martyrdom, sacrifice, and resistance.

Simultaneous trajectories

These two trajectories are unfolding simultaneously, in tension with one another, across different Shia societies. The first points toward fragmentation. Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Shia identity has been closely tied to the idea of “political Shiism” – a model in which religious authority is enshrined as the supreme decision maker within a state and projected outward through networks of religious and political influence. Iran positioned itself as the guardian and leader of Shia communities worldwide, building alliances with groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and various militias and political factions in Iraq. The current war places this model under severe strain. With Iran immeasurably weakened – militarily and economically – its ability to sustain this transnational network is considerably diminished. This could lead to what might be called the “nationalization” of Shia identity. Shiism will not be seen as a vehicle for geopolitical struggle but a religious tradition that coexists with multiple political arrangements. Yet, this is only one side of the story. Wars do not merely fragment identities; they also forge them. The same conflict that has weakened institutional structures can intensify emotional



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Shia identity faces the possibility of fragmentation or radical consolidation

and symbolic bonds. The alternative trajectory is one of consolidation and radicalisation. If the war is framed – and experienced – by Shia communities as an assault not just on Iran but on Shia identity itself, it could reinforce a shared sense of collective victimhood.

For centuries, Shia consciousness has been shaped by the memory of oppression under Sunni-dominated empires. The Islamic Republic successfully tapped into this historical narrative, recasting contemporary conflicts as continuations of a long struggle against injustice. The current war adds a further dimension: the perception of being targeted not only by regional Sunni oppressors such as the House of Saud but also by powerful external actors, particularly Israel and the United States. In such a context, differences of nationality or political orientation may recede in importance, overshadowed by a shared narrative of existential threat.

What Karbala represents

At the heart of this consolidating and radicalising narrative lies the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE, in which Imam Hussain and his small band of followers were martyred by the forces of the Umayyad caliph Yazid. This is the foundational event of Shia identity. It is not merely a historical episode but a living symbol, reenacted annually in rituals of mourning and remembrance. Karbala represents the triumph of moral truth over brute power, the willingness to make the supreme sacrifice in the face of injustice. If Shia communities perceive themselves as under siege, Karbala provides a ready-made narrative through which to interpret their experience.

This consolidation and radicalisation would also reinvigorate the concept of “resistance”. This war and especially the near total devastation of South Lebanon, which is predominantly Shia, and the uprooting of its population by Israeli invaders could deepen this orientation. Resistance would no longer be simply a strategic

choice; it would be an expression of identity itself. The juxtaposition of these two trajectories captures the uncertainty of the present moment. These dynamics are not evenly distributed. In countries such as Iraq, where the Shia are a demographic majority and deeply invested in state institutions, the pull toward nationalisation may be stronger especially if Grand Ayatollah Sistani and the Najaf religious establishment throw their weight behind it. In Lebanon and Bahrain, where identity is more closely tied to perceptions of oppression, consolidation may prove more compelling. In Iran the suffering inflicted by the United States-Israeli attacks, seen by Iranians of all political hues as unprovoked and unjustified, is likely to reinforce the Karbala syndrome and, therefore, aid consolidation as well as radicalisation.

Looking ahead

The outcome will depend not only on the course of the war but on how it is interpreted. For in Shiism, as in all living traditions, identity is not merely inherited; it is continually reconstructed through the interplay of history, memory, and experience.

While on the surface it appears like a toss up between the two trajectories, given the transnational nature of Shia suffering, it is more than likely that consolidation as well as radicalisation may prevail over fragmentation or at the very least inspire a significant section of the Shia population into action across national boundaries.

If the latter prediction holds true, the war against Iran may end up spawning a Shia variant of al-Qaeda that, like the original version, could make the U.S. its primary target. Lebanon, a failing state, could provide the breeding ground and sanctuary for such an organisation as the failed Afghan state did for the original al-Qaeda.

The law of unintended consequences works in unpredictable ways.

Static Linkages

- Sunni-Shia split in Islamic history
- Theocracy and fusion of religion with politics
- Proxy wars in international relations
- Non-state actors in global security
- Fragile states and terrorism
- Strategic importance of Strait of Hormuz
- Energy security and maritime chokepoints
- Identity politics and radicalisation
- Religious symbolism in political mobilisation

Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Rise in sectarian conflict in West Asia
- Increased radicalisation among vulnerable groups
- Threat to maritime trade and oil supply
- Expansion of proxy warfare
- Possibility of emergence of new extremist organisations

Opportunities

- Weakening of transnational militancy networks
- Greater integration of Shia groups into national politics
- Scope for diplomatic settlement in West Asia

Impact on India

- Threat to energy security
- Risk to Indian diaspora in Gulf region
- Impact on crude oil prices and inflation
- Importance of balanced diplomacy with:
 - Iran
 - Israel
 - Gulf countries
 - United States

Way Forward

- Promote diplomatic resolution through multilateral forums.
- Strengthen regional dialogue mechanisms in West Asia.
- Counter radicalisation through inclusive governance.
- Ensure maritime security in Strait of Hormuz.
- India should continue strategic autonomy in West Asia policy.
- Focus on energy diversification and strategic petroleum reserves.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The ongoing Iran-Israel-U.S. tensions have revived debates on the future of Shia political identity in West Asia.
- Iran’s weakening due to prolonged conflict and sanctions may affect its influence over Shia groups such as Hezbollah and Houthis.
- Analysts suggest two possible trends:
 - Fragmentation of Shia identity into nation-centric politics
 - Radicalisation and consolidation around resistance narratives
- The Battle of Karbala and the concept of martyrdom are again being used in political mobilisation.

Key Points

- 1979 Iranian Revolution institutionalised “Political Shiism”.
- Iran projected itself as protector of Shia populations globally.
- Major Iran-linked groups:
 - Hezbollah (Lebanon)
 - Houthis (Yemen)
 - Iraqi Shia militias
- Karbala (680 CE):
 - Central event in Shia history
 - Symbol of sacrifice against injustice
- Conflict may increase:
 - Sectarian tensions
 - Anti-West sentiments
 - Proxy warfare
- Weak states like Lebanon may witness rise of extremist organisations.
- Strait of Hormuz remains strategically important for global oil supply.

Building bridges

Battery storage capacity must keep pace with solar energy generation

India scaled a record peak demand of 256.1 GW on April 25 with solar plants supplying 21.5% of the afternoon load – an all-time high, and the clearest signal yet that the country's installed solar fleet can do real work when the sun is overhead. But the same day's full 24-hour ledger told a more sobering story. When there was accounting for the whole day of April 25, solar contributed only about 10.8% of daily generation, and just 0.1% of the evening's needs after sunset. Solar's share of India's installed electric capacity has nearly doubled from about 15% in 2022 to nearly 28% in early 2026. However, solar accounted for roughly 5.6% of generation on India's peak-demand day in 2022 and only increased to the 10.8% of April – a clear indication of the yawning gap that remains between the realities of the present and what is possible. The bottleneck is not panels, land or ambition but the inability to use the vast stores of generated electrons through batteries. In fact, such is the paucity of battery storage that States which are prolific producers of solar power are being asked to halt their supply, lest it compromise the stability of India's electric grid. In 2025, India had to curtail 2.3 terawatt hours of solar generation between late May and December, equivalent to 18% of average monthly solar output, with 0.9 TWh (terra-watt hours) wasted in October alone. Given that producers of such electricity must be compensated, this ends up being a cost to the public exchequer which pays for power that was never delivered. The India Meteorological Department's forecast of a below-normal monsoon at 92% of the Long Period Average – the first such warning in 11 years – only sharpens the argument: a hotter, drier summer means greater daytime demand, which is precisely when solar should be doing the heavy lifting.

The encouraging news is battery economics. Standalone two-hour battery storage tariffs fell from around ₹2.21 lakh per MW per month in early 2025 to ₹1.48 lakh by year-end. The challenge is execution. Only 0.7 GWh of battery storage was operational in India by end-2025, with another 2 GWh expected by December 2026. The Centre and States must now focus less on tendering and more on commissioning – pairing every fresh solar auction with mandatory co-located storage and resolving the financing wall facing aggressively bid low-tariff projects. Solar capacity without storage is a half-built bridge.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- India recorded an all-time peak electricity demand of 256.1 GW on April 25, 2026.
- Solar power supplied around 21.5% of afternoon electricity demand, the highest ever daytime contribution.
- However, solar contributed only 10.8% of total daily electricity generation due to lack of storage capacity.
- Solar contribution during evening peak demand remained negligible after sunset.
- India curtailed nearly 2.3 TWh of solar electricity in 2025 because of grid stability concerns and inadequate storage infrastructure.
- Battery storage tariffs declined significantly in 2025, improving prospects for renewable energy integration.
- The issue highlights the growing importance of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) in India's renewable energy transition.

Key Points

- India's installed solar capacity share increased from nearly 15% (2022) to around 28% (2026).

- Despite rapid solar expansion, generation share remains lower because solar is intermittent.
- Lack of battery storage leads to:
 - Renewable energy curtailment
 - Grid instability
 - Wastage of generated electricity
 - Financial losses
- India had only around 0.7 GWh operational battery storage capacity by end-2025.
- Battery storage tariffs declined from around:
 - ₹2.21 lakh/MW/month → ₹1.48 lakh/MW/month in 2025.
- Government initiatives:
 - National Solar Mission
 - Green Energy Corridors
 - PLI Scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cells
 - PM-KUSUM Scheme
 - National Green Hydrogen Mission
- India's targets:
 - 500 GW non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030
 - Net-zero emissions by 2070

Static Linkages

- Renewable energy sources are intermittent in nature.
- Grid stability depends upon balancing supply and demand in real time.
- Energy storage systems improve grid flexibility and reliability.
- Pumped hydro and lithium-ion batteries are major storage technologies.
- Electricity falls under the Concurrent List.
- Sustainable development balances economic growth and environmental protection.
- Fossil fuel-based electricity contributes to greenhouse gas emissions.
- India is a party to the Paris Climate Agreement.
- Smart grids reduce transmission losses and improve efficiency.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reduces dependence on imported fossil fuels.
- Supports India's climate commitments.
- Enhances energy security.
- Helps in reducing carbon emissions.

Challenges

- Inadequate battery storage infrastructure.
- High initial investment costs.
- Dependence on imported lithium and critical minerals.
- Financial weakness of DISCOMs.
- Transmission and grid integration bottlenecks.

- Renewable energy curtailment causing economic losses.

Concerns

- Capacity addition without storage creates inefficiency.
- Evening peak demand still depends heavily on thermal power.
- Curtailment reduces investor confidence in renewable sector.

Way Forward

- Mandate battery storage with future solar projects.
- Expand Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS).
- Promote pumped hydro storage projects.
- Strengthen Green Energy Corridors.
- Develop domestic battery manufacturing ecosystem.
- Improve DISCOM financial health.
- Promote smart grids and time-of-day pricing.
- Encourage battery recycling and circular economy.

At sea

The expansion of high-end frigate fleet must be in step with perceived threats

The Indian Navy's Project 17A is a ₹45,000-crore programme to build seven 'Nilgiri'-class frigates, with anti-air, anti-surface, and anti-submarine capabilities, as an advanced complement to the 'Shivalik' frigates and a precursor to Project 17B. The Project delivered the *INS Mahendragiri* on April 30, completing six deliveries in 17 months, but had previously faced multiple delays. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has flagged hundreds of design changes in previous warship classes during construction. Deliveries had been delayed even though ships were nominally complete because they lacked critical components such as engines and sensors, allowing the projects to meet commissioning dates on paper while leaving the hull unprepared for combat. A 2025 CAG report found that the Navy was inducting platforms without building the supporting infrastructure. While Project 17A used 75% indigenous components by value, many critical parts were sourced from abroad, and without them the vessels' final integration was withheld. Currently, India can build most of each ship but exercises limited control over timelines.

The Indian Ocean carries most of India's energy imports as well as Chinese naval deployments, but the nature of these challenges alone does not resolve the kind and scale of response they merit. India built the Chain of Static Sensors after the 2008 Mumbai attacks, with radar hardware involving imported parts. The Chain has been extended to Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and the Seychelles, and together with naval platforms forms a detect-decide-respond system. But while naval satellites and underwater sensor networks provide the 'detect' aspect, the frigates' radars and sonars remain the most imported – and thus most delayed – components, limiting the vessels' ability to function as mobile sensors. Adding more surface combatants is like adding receivers to a network still transmitting a fuzzy picture. Granted, securing sea lanes and addressing non-traditional threats such as Houthi drone and missile activity justify some number of multi-role frigates. However, these platforms are also overkill for countering piracy and smuggling. Heightened surveillance and the Indian Coast Guard also address the 26/11 scenario. And while the People's Liberation Army Navy has been increasing its submarine presence in the region, an Indian hull lacking the premium sensors required to find these vessels is effectively not responding to China's presence. What then is the purpose of expanding the high-end frigate fleet? One possibility is to sustain domestic shipyards and absorb new technologies, but this risks allowing industry interests to supersede the demands of the threat environment. In sum, India has a response fleet facing delays, a sensor grid with incomplete coverage and overdue upgrades, a domestic industrial ecosystem that still depends on imports, and, ultimately, investments that are out of step with the threats they are meant to address.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- *INS Mahendragiri*, a Nilgiri-class stealth frigate under Project 17A, was delivered on April 30.
- Project 17A is a ₹45,000-crore programme to build 7 stealth frigates for the Indian Navy.
- The CAG flagged delays due to:
 - Design changes
 - Delayed import of engines, radars, and sonars
 - Incomplete combat integration
- Concerns were also raised over induction of ships without adequate infrastructure and operational readiness.
- The issue is important amid:
 - Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean
 - Maritime security threats
 - Post-26/11 coastal security reforms

Key Points

- Built by:
 - Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL)
 - Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE)
- Successor to Shivalik-class frigates (Project 17).

- Capabilities:
 - Anti-air warfare
 - Anti-surface warfare
 - Anti-submarine warfare
 - Stealth and network-centric systems
- Around 75% indigenous content by value, but critical systems still imported.
- Chain of Static Sensors established after 26/11; extended to Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and Seychelles.
- Strategic role:
 - Protect Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs)
 - Counter Chinese naval expansion in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

Static Points

- India heavily depends on maritime trade and energy imports.
- Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is crucial for coastal security.
- Defence indigenisation promoted under:
 - Atmanirbhar Bharat
 - Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP)
- CAG audits defence expenditure under Article 149.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Enhances India's blue-water naval capability.
- Strengthens maritime deterrence in the IOR.
- Promotes indigenous shipbuilding.

Challenges

- Dependence on imported sensors and propulsion systems.
- Delays reduce combat preparedness.
- Weak sensor capability affects anti-submarine operations.
- Risk of fleet expansion without technological self-reliance.

Way Forward

- Develop indigenous radars, sonars, and engines.
- Strengthen DRDO-private sector collaboration.
- Reduce design changes and improve project management.
- Prioritise surveillance and sensor networks.
- Integrate shipbuilding with logistics infrastructure.

A student's grit, a Lucknow school's lesson in inclusion



KAUSHIK DAS
GUPTA

THE DECLARATION of school passing-out results often brings to light accounts of remarkable grit and fortitude — of young people taking important steps in their aspirational journey despite formidable odds. Among this year's exceptional graduates is Sarah Moin, who scored more than 98 per cent — the highest among 258 students at Lucknow's Christ Church College. But her achievement is much more than academic excellence in conventional terms. It is a testament to the 19-year-old's resolve in the face of layered challenges, one that was nurtured by an ecosystem that responded with empathy and imagination.

Sarah's life took a difficult turn early. Diagnosed at the age of four with a rare condition that gradually dimmed her vision, she would, within a few years, lose her hearing as well, followed by the onset of speech difficulties. The youngster's parents formed the first circle of resilience around her. They chose a school that gave wings to her dreams. Christ Church College arranged individualised classes, ensured that textbooks were scanned and converted into accessible digital formats, and enabled her to engage with them through a Braille-based device. Question papers were adapted so she could read them through touch, and her responses were transcribed into standard text for evaluation.

Sarah Moin's achievement is a testament to her resolve in the face of layered challenges, one that was nurtured by an ecosystem that responded with empathy and imagination

In recent years, students' enrolment has increased appreciably. Yet, survey after survey has shown that this achievement remains incomplete in the face of rigid pedagogies that are not sensitive to varied learning experiences. Sarah's journey shows that inclusion is not just about bringing the child to the classroom but also a result of creative efforts to transform institutional culture to respond to diverse needs.

Therein also lies an irony. Sarah's story is compelling because it directs attention to a larger, more uncomfortable question. Is India's educational ecosystem, as a whole, equipped — or even willing — to become an enabler in the way her school did?

Flagship programmes and legislative frameworks, such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education Act, have sought to institutionalise the idea that education is a right, not a privilege. At the level of policy, the government acknowledges that

education must respond to diversity — of ability, gender, caste, language, and socio-economic background. The National Education Policy 2020 has foregrounded inclusion, flexibility, and multidisciplinary learning; it has spoken of teachers' autonomy. Yet, teachers like Salman Ali Qazi, who stood by Sarah, enabling her to use the assistive technologies and build bridges between curriculum and cognition, are rare.

The scattered, but significant, instances of schools and educators rising to the challenge of diverse learners also underline the flipside — overworked, disempowered and undertrained teachers and curricula that often privilege rote learning. For every student who gets adaptive support, a large number of children at intersections of disadvantage — from marginalised castes, minorities, girls, to those with disabilities — struggle to navigate structures which do not recognise their needs. India stands at a demographic crossroads, with one of the youngest populations in the world. This dividend can only be earned if the education system equips young people — not a privileged subset, but all of them — with the confidence and capabilities required to participate meaningfully in the economy.

There is, of course, no template to address diversity and inequality. And, it may not be correct to replicate Christ Church College's programmes in another context. However, Sarah's story is illustrative of what an inclusive system can achieve. The question, then, is whether the choices she had can be scaled — whether the sensitivity and creativity demonstrated by the Lucknow school can become the norm rather than a rarity. Can classrooms across the country be reoriented to accommodate diverse learning needs? Can teacher training programmes equip educators to engage with difference not as a challenge to be managed, but as an opportunity to enrich the learning environment?

These are not easy questions, and they do not admit quick answers. Today, as Sarah stands at the threshold of a major transition, let's all wish her the best. And, hope her story becomes the catalyst for expanding the horizons of many others.

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- Major challenges:
 - Lack of trained teachers
 - Inaccessible infrastructure
 - Rote-learning pedagogy
 - Digital divide
 - Poor implementation of disability-friendly measures

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before law
- Article 15 – Prohibition of discrimination
- Article 21A – Right to Education
- Article 41 – Assistance in cases of disability
- Article 46 – Educational interests of weaker sections
- Directive Principles of State Policy
- Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016
- Samagra Shiksha Scheme
- National Education Policy 2020
- SDG 4 – Inclusive and equitable quality education
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Demonstrates importance of inclusive pedagogy.
- Highlights role of teachers and institutions in social empowerment.
- Promotes substantive equality rather than formal equality.
- Supports constitutional vision of social justice.

Challenges

- Shortage of special educators.
- Weak implementation of RPwD Act.
- Limited accessibility in government schools.
- Poor awareness regarding assistive technologies.
- Examination systems remain largely non-inclusive.

Constitutional/Ethical Dimensions

- Education is a tool for dignity and empowerment.
- Inclusive classrooms strengthen equality and social cohesion.
- Ethical governance requires empathy-based policymaking.

Way Forward

- Strengthen implementation of RPwD Act, 2016.
- Expand teacher training in inclusive education.
- Increase funding for accessible infrastructure and assistive technology.
- Promote flexible and competency-based assessments.
- Improve digital accessibility in schools.
- Ensure convergence among education, health, and social justice ministries.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Sarah Moin, a visually and hearing-impaired student from Lucknow's Christ Church College, scored above 98% in Class XII examinations.
- The school enabled accessible learning through:
 - Braille-supported digital devices
 - Scanned textbooks
 - Modified examination papers
 - Individual academic assistance
- The issue highlights the larger debate on inclusive education and accessibility in India's education system.
- The development is significant in the context of:
 - National Education Policy (NEP) 2020
 - Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016
 - SDG-4 (Inclusive and Equitable Education)

Key Points

- Inclusive education means integrating children with disabilities into mainstream education with adequate support systems.
- RPwD Act, 2016 mandates inclusive education for children with disabilities.
- NEP 2020 emphasizes:
 - Equitable and inclusive education
 - Flexibility in learning
 - Use of assistive technologies
- India's demographic dividend depends upon quality human capital formation.

Weakening rupee points to challenges ahead

THE INDIAN rupee continues to weaken. On Tuesday, it hovered around 95.36 against the dollar during early trading. Since the beginning of this year, the currency has fallen by around 5.64 per cent. Sentiment continues to be weighed down by the conflict in West Asia, with fresh attacks rattling investors. But the pressure on the Indian currency predates the Iran war. Last year, the rupee fell by roughly 5 per cent against the dollar. The problem is on both the current and capital accounts.

Global crude oil prices remain elevated due to energy market dislocations, exerting pressure on the current account. Brent crude is currently around \$113 per barrel. In April, the price of the Indian crude oil basket averaged \$114.48 per barrel, according to data from the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell. There is the possibility of the current account deficit widening to around 2 per cent in 2026-27. While this is considerably lower than that around the period of the taper tantrum — the deficit had widened to 4.8 per cent of GDP in 2012-13 — financing it will be challenging in the current environment. Capital flows are under pressure. So far in the calendar year, foreign portfolio investors have taken out around \$21.2 billion from the stock markets. This comes after outflows of \$18.9 billion last year. While the central bank has been taking steps to ease the stress on the rupee, its short dollar book has swelled, the pressure on the currency continues. In previous episodes of such stress, the RBI attempted to facilitate capital inflows through various instruments. For instance, during the taper tantrum, funds were mobilised through the FCNR-B deposits.

So far, retail fuel prices have not been adjusted to reflect the higher global prices. But there are limits to the burden that can be borne by the oil companies and the government — the war has been going on for more than two months. Higher prices at the pump will push up retail inflation across the country — retail inflation edged up to 3.4 per cent in March. A few days ago, the price of the commercial LPG cylinder was raised by Rs 993, which will translate to higher input costs for restaurants, hotels, commercial kitchens etc, feeding price pressures. A prolonged conflict will impact economic momentum, worsening the growth-inflation dynamics. The macroeconomic situation calls for deft and delicate management.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Indian rupee weakened by around 5.64% this year amid West Asia conflict and global uncertainty.
- Rising crude oil prices increased pressure on India's external sector.
- Brent crude remained around \$113/barrel; Indian crude basket averaged \$114.48/barrel (PPAC data).
- FPI outflows of nearly \$21.2 billion recorded this year.
- Concerns over widening Current Account Deficit (CAD), imported inflation, and slowdown in growth momentum.

Key Points

- Higher crude prices increase India's import bill and worsen CAD.
- CAD may widen to nearly 2% of GDP.
- During the 2013 Taper Tantrum, CAD had reached 4.8% of GDP.
- Persistent FPI outflows weaken rupee stability.
- RBI intervening through forex market operations to stabilize currency.
- Increase in commercial LPG prices likely to raise input costs and inflationary pressures.

- Retail inflation increased to 3.4% in March.
- Prolonged geopolitical tensions may worsen growth-inflation dynamics.

Static Linkages

- India follows a Managed Float Exchange Rate System.
- CAD includes trade in goods, services, remittances, and income flows.
- Capital account includes FDI, FPI, ECBs, and banking capital.
- Rupee depreciation can increase export competitiveness but raises import costs.
- Imported inflation occurs due to rise in global commodity prices.
- RBI uses forex reserves and market intervention to stabilize currency.
- FCNR(B) deposits were used during the 2013 Taper Tantrum to attract forex inflows.
- Crude oil prices directly impact inflation, fiscal deficit, and BoP stability.

Critical Analysis

Challenges

- Rising crude prices worsen trade deficit.
- Imported inflation increases fuel and transportation costs.
- FPI outflows reduce foreign exchange inflows.
- Pressure on RBI forex reserves.
- Risk of stagflation-like situation (high inflation + low growth).

Positives

- Rupee depreciation may support exports.
- India's CAD still lower than 2013 crisis levels.
- Strong forex reserves provide buffer against volatility.

Way Forward

- Diversify crude import sources.
- Promote renewable energy and green hydrogen.
- Encourage stable FDI inflows over volatile FPI flows.
- Strengthen export competitiveness.
- Maintain calibrated RBI intervention.
- Expand strategic petroleum reserves.