



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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SC weighs SOP for urgent cases affecting citizens' life and liberty

Constitutional remedies must be accessible at all time, says petition in top court; Bench headed by CJI Kant says an SOP could be put in place to reduce 'response time' in cases such as illegal detentions, demolition drives or other state actions

Krishnan Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to consider framing a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to allow citizens to knock on the doors of the courts any time, day or night, in cases affecting life and liberty, including illegal detentions, imminent demolition of homes, deportations, custodial violence, or other state actions.

Beyond court schedules
A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant was hearing a petition filed by a top court advocate, Maheshwari Reim, who said the courts cannot afford to close especially against the background of credible reports of late-night arrests, early-morning demolition drives, and deportation or executive actions undertaken during weekends or holidays.

"The absence of a structured and institutionalised

mechanism ensuring continuous judicial accessibility may result in irreversible consequences

MAHESHWARI REIM
Petitioner

Preparation of an SOP should be undertaken by the Supreme Court on its administrative rather than judicial side.

TUSHAR MEHTA
Solicitor General

tion of an SOP should be undertaken by the top court on its administrative rather than judicial side.

In response to the law officer, the Chief Justice noted that High Courts did not come within the administrative ambit of the top court in a federal set-up, indicating that the petition may have to be heard and orders passed on the judicial side.

Justice Jyotsna Bagchi, a part of the Bench, said there was a difference in approach in accessing justice during office hours and after office hours. The judge said a "graded approach" to access to justice after court hours cannot be interpreted as a denial of justice.

Digital access

The judge pointed out that courts never "slow-up"

when there was digital access to justice through e-filing. "A letter, an email or a phone call would be enough to activate the justice system," Justice Bagchi said.

Ms. Reim agreed with Justice Bagchi that technological advancements, including digital filing, electronic court records and virtual hearing infrastructure had significantly enhanced the capacity of courts to provide remote access to justice.

"The present institutional framework of courts largely restricts access to judicial remedies to designated court hours, working days and limited vacation benches. As a result, individuals facing urgent violations of liberty and fundamental rights often encounter significant practical difficulty in obtaining immediate judicial protection during nights, weekends, public holidays and court recesses," Ms. Reim submitted.

"However, these technological capabilities have not yet been integrated into a uniform institutional framework enabling emergency judicial access for urgent constitutional matters outside regular court hours," she submitted.

- Objective is to reduce judicial response time in emergencies.
- Digital platforms such as e-filing, e-records and virtual courts can support emergency hearings.
- Any institutional framework involving High Courts must respect India's federal judicial structure.

Static Concepts to Remember

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 14 – Equality before Law.
- Article 21 – Protection of Life and Personal Liberty.
- Article 22 – Protection against arbitrary arrest and detention.
- Article 32 – Constitutional Remedies (Supreme Court).
- Article 226 – Writ jurisdiction of High Courts.
- Article 39A – Equal Justice and Free Legal Aid (DPSP).
- Article 141 – Law declared by Supreme Court binding on all courts.
- Article 142 – Supreme Court's power to do complete justice.

Important Writ

- Habeas Corpus – "Produce the Body"; issued against illegal detention.

Important Constitutional Principles

- Rule of Law
- Judicial Review
- Independence of Judiciary
- Access to Justice
- Due Process (through Maneka Gandhi judgment)

Related Government Initiative

- e-Courts Mission Mode Project
- National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)

Supreme Court Judgments to Remember

- A.K. Gopalan (1950) – Initial narrow interpretation of Article 21.
- Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978) – Expanded Article 21; procedure must be just, fair and reasonable.
- Hussainara Khatoon (1979) – Right to Speedy Trial under Article 21.
- K.S. Puttaswamy (2017) – Right to Privacy as part of Article 21.
- D.K. Basu (1997) – Guidelines against custodial violence and illegal arrest.

Constitutional Significance

- Makes constitutional remedies more meaningful.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Supreme Court agreed to examine the framing of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to ensure round-the-clock judicial access in cases involving life, personal liberty and Fundamental Rights.
- The petition highlighted the need for urgent judicial intervention in cases such as:
 - Illegal detention or arrest
 - Custodial violence
 - Imminent demolition of homes
 - Deportation
 - Other urgent executive actions
- The Bench observed that courts should have a mechanism to respond to such cases even during nights, weekends, holidays and court vacations.
- The Court also emphasized the use of e-filing, virtual hearings and digital communication for emergency constitutional remedies.

Why is this Important?

- Reinforces the constitutional guarantee under Article 21.
- Strengthens Access to Justice, an essential feature of the Rule of Law.
- Reflects the growing role of technology in judicial governance.
- Important from Polity, Governance and Judiciary perspectives in UPSC.

Key Points

- Supreme Court is considering a uniform SOP for urgent judicial access beyond court working hours.
- Applicable only to exceptional cases involving immediate threat to:
 - Life
 - Personal liberty
 - Fundamental Rights

- Prevents irreversible violations before courts reopen.
- Enhances protection against arbitrary executive action.
- Promotes citizen-centric justice delivery.
- Strengthens constitutional governance.

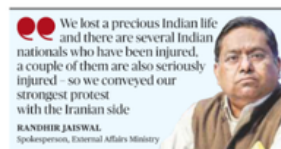
Challenges

- Defining what qualifies as an "emergency".
- Preventing misuse through frivolous petitions.
- Availability of judges and registry staff round the clock.
- Uniform implementation across all High Courts.
- Cybersecurity and secure digital infrastructure.
- Additional administrative and financial burden.

Way Forward

- Frame a nationwide SOP for emergency constitutional matters.
- Create rotational emergency constitutional benches.
- Integrate emergency hearings with the e-Courts ecosystem.
- Prescribe clear criteria for urgent listing.
- Strengthen digital infrastructure and cybersecurity.
- Periodic review of implementation by the judiciary.

Govt. summons Iran envoy after missile hit kills Indian sailor



Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday summoned the Iranian Deputy Chief of Mission and registered a "strong protest" after one Indian sailor died and several were seriously injured when two UAE-flagged energy tankers carrying Indian seafarers were hit by Iranian cruise missiles earlier in the day.

The official spokesperson of the External Affairs Ministry, Randhir Jaiswal, said the Indian side had conveyed "deepest concerns" about the incident in the Strait of Hormuz and urged for "de-escalation".

"We strongly condemn these attacks and acts of violence targeting seafarers and disrupting free and safe navigation through international waters like the Strait of Hormuz. We also reiterate our deep concern on account of resumption of attacks and escalation of hostilities in the West Asian region and call for immediate cessation of violence and a return to dialogue and diplomacy in the interests of peace, security and stability in the region," said the Ministry.

Call for de-escalation
"We lost a precious Indian life and there are several Indian nationals who have been injured, a couple of them are also seriously injured - so we conveyed our strongest protest with the Iranian side on this particular matter. These attacks must stop at the earliest - at the same time there should be de-escalation and the two sides should come to the negotiating table and take the path of dialogue and diplomacy so that peace and stability can

be ensured in West Asia," said Mr. Jaiswal, calling for "safe and unimpeded navigation and flow of commerce through the Strait of Hormuz."

India's protest came hours after the ships MT Al Bahiyah and MT Mombasa, carrying around 30 Indian seafarers among the total crew of 46, came under attack from the Iranian side while transiting through the Strait of Hormuz on Tuesday morning. One Indian crew member out of 12 Indians on board Al Bahiyah died and one was injured. Out of 18 Indian sailors on board MT Mombasa, nine suffered injuries while two are "reported to be seriously injured", said the Ministry. Indian diplomats and other officials in the UAE are closely monitoring the situation and extending assistance to the affected Indians on board the two vessels.

Earlier, the Ministry of Defence of the UAE had announced that both the tankers were targeted by two Iranian cruise missiles "while transiting the southern shipping lane of the Strait of Hormuz, within Omani territorial waters." Apart from Indian citizens, two Ukrainian nationals were also injured in the incident, said the UAE authorities. UAE has condemned the incident terming it a "blatant attack" and a "serious violation and a clear breach of international law".

The Indian government said that targeting of commercial shipping and civilian infrastructure in the region "must cease".

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- important (Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas).
- India is among the world's largest suppliers of merchant navy personnel, with over 3 lakh Indian seafarers employed globally (Directorate General of Shipping).
- The Ministry of Ports directed:
 - Vessel-wise monitoring of Indian seafarers.
 - Operational dashboard for ships in the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman and Strait of Hormuz.
 - Fresh security threat assessment before sailing through conflict zones.

Static Linkages

- UNCLOS, 1982 Governs maritime rights and obligations of States.
- Part III provides for Transit Passage through international straits.
- Strait of Hormuz Between Iran (north) and Oman (Musandam Peninsula) & UAE (south).
- Connects Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea.
- SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) India's maritime vision for ensuring security, stability and cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 Regulates merchant shipping in India.
- Directorate General of Shipping Apex maritime administration under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- India lodged a strong diplomatic protest with Iran after two UAE-flagged oil tankers (MT Al Bahiyah and MT Mombasa) carrying Indian seafarers were reportedly hit by Iranian cruise missiles while transiting the Strait of Hormuz.
- One Indian seafarer was killed and several others were injured.
- India condemned attacks on commercial shipping, reiterated the need for safe and unimpeded navigation, and called for de-escalation and dialogue in West Asia.
- The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) launched a 'Seafarer-First' response, including real-time monitoring of Indian seafarers in the Persian Gulf region.

Key Points

- Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint.
- It connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- Nearly 20% of global petroleum liquids consumption passes through the Strait (U.S. Energy Information Administration).
- Around 60–65% of India's crude oil imports originate from West Asian countries, making uninterrupted navigation strategically

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Highlights India's dependence on secure Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).
- Reinforces the importance of freedom of navigation under international law.
- Demonstrates India's proactive diplomatic and humanitarian response.

Challenges

- Escalation in West Asia threatens India's energy imports.
- Increased freight and marine insurance costs.
- Risks to Indian seafarers employed on foreign-flagged vessels.
- Disruptions to global oil supply chains may fuel inflation.

Way Forward

- Strengthen Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).
- Enhance coordination among MEA, Indian Navy and shipping agencies.
- Expand strategic petroleum reserves.
- Diversify crude oil import sources.
- Strengthen SAGAR and regional maritime cooperation.
- Ensure robust welfare and emergency support for Indian seafarers.
- Promote peaceful resolution of regional conflicts through diplomacy.

Indian seafarer recalls fear and chaos during transit through Strait of Hormuz

Vighnesh P. Venkitesh
CHENNAI

Chaos, uncertainty, numbness, and conflicting orders marked the ordeal of an Indian seafarer aboard a tanker that transited the Strait of Hormuz on Monday.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, the seafarer, who requested anonymity, explained how the fully-loaded Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC), carrying more than two million barrels of crude oil, and its crew were caught between the threats from the Iranian Navy to turn back and encouragement to move forward from the U.S., while

transiting the strait through the southern route close to the Oman coast.

The situation was relatively normal when they went into the Persian Gulf to load at Basrah in Iraq, but it deteriorated rapidly as they finished loading and started to return, with ships coming under attack near Oman and warnings from the Joint Maritime Information Centre moving from medium to substantial and severe threat levels. The sailor said the company instructed them to halt, and they drifted along Abu Dhabi out of port limits (OPL) for around four days.

While the company respected the consent of the seafarers to make the risky return journey, there was also "immense pressure" from it to make the transit, the sailor said. The incentive offered was "too good to pass up", and the crew decided to take the risk.

The transit was planned to begin on the morning of July 12, and he described the scene as "absolute chaos" following an attack on *GFS Galaxy*, whose crew, Indians among them, were forced to abandon ship.

The initial call was to halt their transit and turn back, but the company offered to "double its incen-



Tankers and cargo vessels are seen in the Gulf of Oman, along shipping routes linking the Strait of Hormuz and the Arabian Sea. AP

tives" to move on, he said. Things were normal till the entry of Hormuz, a 12-hour journey from Abu Dhabi OPL, and regions such as the periphery of Abu Musa

Island, where ships usually begin to hear Iranian warnings, were silent, he said.

The entry to Hormuz, abeam of Mina al Saqr hub, was different. There were

around six smaller vessels in front of their tanker at this point, and warnings began flooding in through the very high-frequency radio system, with Iran ordering vessels not to enter as the strait was "closed".

In a dilemma

"We were not just scared, we were numb. We had reached the entrance and now had no idea what to do," the sailor said. The dilemma was whether to abort the transit or not. The smaller vessels replied that they were on their way to the port hub and altered course, he said. However, the U.S. Navy began broadcasting messages in reply

to Iran, asking ships to move forward, reiterating that they were in "international waters and would be protected". But this was not reassuring to the crew with Iran asking them "not to trust" the U.S. side.

"It was psychological warfare, and the conflicting authority at play, not knowing whom to trust, was the most jarring aspect of the journey," he said.

There were two other ships along with the tanker on the strait, and he could hear choppers and jets flying past. He said the transit could not have been possible without the support of the U.S. Navy. The ship was in contact with the U.S.

forces throughout the journey, updating its position every 10 minutes and looking out for signs of threat and reporting in detail every 10 miles.

Acknowledging that the U.S. support was "crucial" for the transit, the sailor said that he felt there was support from Iran as well.

Now miles off the dangerous territory and en route to entering the international waters in the Arabian Sea, the sailor recalled the moment the warnings started flooding the radio at the entrance to Hormuz and conceded that he would settle for just "getting to safety alive instead of the insane incentives".

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Amid escalating military tensions in West Asia, commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz has become increasingly vulnerable.
- An Indian seafarer aboard a Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC) carrying over 2 million barrels of crude oil reported receiving conflicting instructions from the Iranian Navy and the U.S. Navy while transiting the Strait.
- The incident highlights the strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz for global energy security, India's crude oil imports, and the safety of Indian seafarers.

Key Points

- Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint.
- It connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and further to the Arabian Sea.
- According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA):
 - Around 20 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum products per day pass through the Strait.
 - It accounts for nearly 20% of global petroleum liquids consumption.
- India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil requirement, with a significant share sourced from Gulf countries.
- Major exporters using the Strait include:
 - Saudi Arabia, Iraq, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Iran
- Any disruption in the Strait can lead to:
 - Rise in global crude oil prices
 - Increase in freight and marine insurance costs
 - Inflationary pressures
 - Widening of India's Current Account Deficit (CAD)
 - Threat to global energy supply chains.

Static Linkages

- Location: Between Iran and Oman's Musandam Peninsula.

- Connects: Persian Gulf → Gulf of Oman → Arabian Sea.
- Governed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982 under the principle of Transit Passage.
- Other important maritime chokepoints:
 - Strait of Malacca
 - Bab-el-Mandeb Strait
 - Suez Canal
 - Panama Canal
- India has established Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) to address temporary disruptions in crude oil supplies.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Demonstrates the strategic importance of maritime chokepoints in global trade.
- Highlights India's dependence on West Asian energy imports.
- Reinforces the need for maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.

Challenges

- Geopolitical conflicts can disrupt global energy supplies.
- Higher crude oil prices adversely affect India's fiscal and external balances.
- Increased operational risks for Indian merchant seafarers.
- Escalation may affect global shipping, insurance, and supply chains.

Way Forward

- Diversify crude oil import sources.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) capacity.
- Strengthen maritime surveillance and naval cooperation.
- Enhance safety protocols for Indian seafarers.
- Accelerate renewable energy adoption to reduce import dependence.
- Promote regional maritime security through international cooperation.

'Gold standard' India-U.K. trade deal is coming into effect today

Commerce Secretary describes pact as one of the most ambitious and aspirational free trade agreements signed by the country; he adds that it will benefit farmers, fisherfolk, officials in U.K. welcome deal and highlight its multi-sectoral impact

T.G.A. Sharad Raghavan,
NEW DELHI

The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and Double Contribution Convention (DCC) that will come into force on Wednesday are a "gold standard" and one of the "most ambitious and aspirational free trade agreements" signed by India, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Tuesday.

He added that the deal benefits India's farmers, fisherfolk, workers and women entrepreneurs. The India-U.K. CETA and the DCC were signed in July last year.

"This is one of the first free trade agreements (FTAs) of its kind, which establishes a future-oriented economic architecture between two major economies of the world," Mr. Agrawal said at a press briefing. "This is also one of the most ambitious and aspirational FTAs of India, which we are operationalising as it dates."

It is a gold standard and the first of its kind be-

Terms of trade

The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and Double Contribution Convention (DCC) are set to come into force on Wednesday.

- Under the CETA, the U.K. will immediately eliminate tariffs on 96.8% of its tariff lines, accounting for 97.7% of the trade value.
- India will immediately eliminate tariffs on 30.3% of the trade value, with 47% more seeing tariffs eliminated in a phased manner.
- The DCC will exempt Indian workers and their employers from paying social security contributions in the U.K. for 5 years if contributions are being made in India.



cause of its wide sectoral coverage and deep reduction in both tariff and non-tariff barriers," he added. Under the deal, the U.K. will immediately eliminate tariffs on 96.8% of its tariff lines, accounting for 97.7% of the trade value. An additional 2% of tariff lines, amounting to 1.8% of trade value, will see reduced tariffs based on quotas. In total, this covers 96.8% of tariff lines and 99.5% of trade value.

India, on the other hand, will immediately eliminate tariffs on 30.3% of the trade value, with 47% more seeing tariffs eliminated in a phased manner. It will also provide reduced quota-based tariffs on 12.1% of the trade value. In total, this would cover 89.4% of trade value. Officials in the U.K. have also welcomed the deal, highlighting a multi-sectoral impact. "For the City of

London, the agreement provides a strong platform to unlock even greater collaboration in financial and professional services, innovation, fintech, sustainable finance and infrastructure investment," Chris Hayward, Policy Chairman of the City of London Corporation, told The Hindu.

"As India continues its remarkable economic growth story, London stands ready to support the mobilisation of global capital and expertise needed to help deliver those goals," he added.

Mr. Agrawal said that the 30 chapters across which negotiations have taken place under this pact extend beyond conventional tariff liberalisation to cover digital trade, government procurement, SMEs, innovation, labour, environment, and gender. He added that the deal addresses non-tariff barriers as well, so that issues like Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) "do not become unjustified trade restrictions for our businesses in the future".

He further explained that the deal protects India's sensitive sectors such as dairy, cereals, pulses, vegetables, gold and jewellery, smartphones, and critical polymers.

'Game changer'

On the DCC, he said that the agreement was a "game changer" for India's services sector and skilled workforce. "Indian employees and their employers contribute around 25% of their salary to the U.K.'s national insurance system," he said. "Their contribution is like a tax of 25% as employees are unable to draw benefits. These are like sunk costs."

He said that the DCC will ensure that workers will not need to pay double contributions towards their social security. That is, if they are paying social security in India, then they will not have to pay it in the U.K. as well for a period of five years.

According to Mr. Agrawal, this will benefit over 75,000 Indian workers and over 900 employers. (With inputs from Sriyam Lakshman in London)

- Additional 47% phased tariff reduction.
- 12.1% under quota-based concessions.
- Total coverage:
 - 89.5% tariff lines
 - 89.4% trade value

Sensitive Sectors Excluded

- Dairy
- Cereals
- Pulses
- Vegetables
- Gold
- Smartphones
- Critical polymers

Non-Tariff Measures Covered

- Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures
- Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)
- Aim: Prevent unjustified restrictions on trade.

Double Contribution Convention (DCC)

- Exempts Indian professionals on temporary assignments (up to 5 years) from paying social security contributions in both countries.
- Benefits:
 - 75,000+ Indian professionals
 - 900+ Indian employers

Static Linkages

- Free Trade Agreement (FTA): Agreement between countries to reduce or eliminate tariffs and other trade barriers.
- WTO Principle: FTAs are permitted under Article XXIV of GATT, 1994, provided they cover substantially all trade.
- Tariff Barrier: Customs duty imposed on imports.
- Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs): Restrictions other than tariffs affecting international trade.
 - Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures Governed by the WTO SPS Agreement.
 - Protect human, animal and plant health.
 - Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Governed by the WTO TBT Agreement.
 - Covers standards, testing, certification and labelling.
- Rules of Origin (RoO): Determine whether goods qualify for preferential tariffs under an FTA.
- Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ): Lower tariff up to a specified import quantity; higher tariff beyond that limit.
- Social Security Agreement (SSA)/Double Contribution Convention: Prevents double payment of social security contributions for temporary overseas workers.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and Double Contribution Convention (DCC) came into force, strengthening bilateral trade, investment, and mobility of professionals.
- CETA is one of India's most comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), covering both tariff and non-tariff measures across goods and services.
- The DCC eliminates double social security contributions for eligible Indian professionals temporarily working in the U.K.

Key Points

India-U.K. CETA

- Covers 30 Chapters including:
 - Trade in Goods
 - Trade in Services
 - Digital Trade
 - Investment
 - Government Procurement
 - MSMEs
 - Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)
 - Labour
 - Environment
 - Gender

Tariff Liberalisation

United Kingdom

- Immediate duty elimination on 96.8% tariff lines.
- Covers 97.7% of India's exports (trade value).
- Additional 2% tariff lines under tariff-rate quotas (TRQs).
- Total coverage:
 - 98.8% tariff lines
 - 99.5% trade value

India

- Immediate tariff elimination on 30.3% of imports (trade value).

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Improves market access for Indian exports.
- Boosts services exports, especially IT and professional services.
- Reduces non-tariff barriers.
- Enhances ease of doing business.
- Strengthens India-U.K. Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
- Supports diversification of India's export markets.

Challenges

- Indian MSMEs must comply with stringent SPS and TBT standards.
- Gains depend on effective utilisation of FTA provisions.
- Possible import competition for domestic industries.
- Limited labour mobility beyond temporary assignments.
- Adjustment costs for vulnerable sectors.

Way Forward

- Increase awareness of FTA provisions among exporters and MSMEs.
- Strengthen quality infrastructure, testing and certification facilities.
- Enhance export competitiveness through logistics and trade facilitation reforms.
- Promote value-added manufacturing under Make in India.
- Improve utilisation of FTAs through capacity building and digital trade platforms.
- Periodically review implementation through institutional mechanisms.

The disruptive rise of India's new political generation

India's political establishment has long spoken of the future tense – young people as tomorrow's leaders, democracy's inheritors, and the next generation of voters. Beneath this language of hope, however, is a political reality, which is that power has remained concentrated among ageing leaders who rarely entrusted young people with real influence. That political fiction is now rapidly fading.

India's youth are no longer "citizens in waiting". They are already shaping elections, influencing political discourse, forcing parties to recalibrate, and redefining how politics itself is practiced in a unique way. This transformation is not simply demographic. India has long been a young country. What is different today is the emergence of youth as an independent political force with its own language, expectations, methods, and centres of influence. Political leaders who fail to recognise this shift increasingly risk irrelevance.

A new political language
The shift is most visible in political communication. For much of the post-Independence years, Indian politics operated through hierarchy and distance: leaders spoke from elevated stages, while citizens listened. Communication flowed through party structures, newspapers, television, and carefully managed public events, depending on spectacle, organisational control, and ideological certainty. That model is weakening rapidly.

Today's youth inhabit a radically different political landscape shaped by short-form videos, memes, podcasts, livestreams, online commentary, and decentralised digital communities. While attention spans may be shorter, political awareness has not declined. Young voters are not necessarily anti-political; they are anti-performance. They respond to accessibility, authenticity, responsiveness, humour, emotional intelligence and transparency over scripted rhetoric. Tamil Nadu offers one of the clearest examples of this shift.

The rise of actor-turned-politician C. Joseph Vijay cannot be explained through celebrity appeal alone. What makes Mr. Vijay's emergence politically significant is his intuitive understanding of a transformed communication ecosystem. More importantly, even leaders within established parties have publicly acknowledged his growing influence among younger voters.



Amal Chandra
Political analyst, columnist and the author of the book, 'The Essential' (2022)



Alex Karavally
Senior Research Associate at the International Institute of Migration and Development

This transformation is also visible in the rise of meme-driven political commentary and satire collectives that increasingly shape public perception among younger audiences. On Instagram, YouTube, and X, informal digital ecosystems now influence political narratives far more rapidly than traditional party communication machinery. The "Cockroach Janta Party" phenomenon – alongside a broader ecosystem of meme creators, satirical commentators, and independent digital voices – reflects a generation engaging with politics through humour, irony, cultural references, and decentralised online participation. Once dismissed as frivolous Internet culture, these spaces increasingly function as parallel arenas of political socialisation and opinion formation.

A similar recalibration is visible elsewhere in India. In Kerala, Congress leader and the "pookie CM" V.D. Satheesan has consciously cultivated an image distinct from the confrontational and centralised styles that increasingly characterised the State's recent political culture. His emphasis on accessibility, dialogue, and participatory communication reflects a recognition that younger citizens no longer respond automatically to ideological inheritance or party loyalty. A political leader unable to communicate within this evolving ecosystem risks irrelevance, regardless of organisational strength.

From protest to participation
India's youth politics is no longer confined to party youth wings or campus elections. The 2017 pro-Jaiyattu protests in Tamil Nadu marked a turning point in understanding how digitally connected youth could sustain mass mobilisation without centralised party leadership. What began as a cultural movement evolved into a wider demonstration of youth-led political coordination powered by social media networks, online narratives, and decentralised participation.

Since then, online political culture – from meme creators and independent digital commentators to podcast ecosystems and Instagram-based political analysis – has become a major force shaping public discourse. Political parties now obsessively monitor online sentiment, adapt campaign messaging to digital reactions, and respond rapidly to narratives emerging far outside traditional institutions. The distinction between "online politics" and "real politics" is steadily disappearing. This broader shift mirrors developments elsewhere in

South Asia. Sri Lanka's 2022 Aragalaya protests demonstrated how digitally connected youth could convert public frustration into sustained political pressure against corruption, dynastic entitlement, and elite detachment. Nepal too has witnessed growing youth-led mobilisations around governance failures, unemployment, and democratic accountability.

India has so far remained relatively insulated from such large-scale upheaval. But recent political developments suggest that a quieter transformation is underway – not necessarily through street uprisings, but through changing patterns of political communication, participation, and voter behaviour.

This also calls into question the assumption that youth mobilisation is inherently anti-establishment or anti-democratic. The rise of Mr. Vijay in Tamil Nadu suggests that where democratic institutions remain credible and electoral participation feels meaningful, young citizens are willing to work within existing democratic structures rather than reject them outright.

The problem is not apathy – it is institutional distrust. Increasingly, younger citizens recognise that much of what passes as "youth engagement" is little more than managed participation without genuine power-sharing. Political parties often speak about bringing youth into politics, but resist the logical consequences of doing so: redistributing authority, opening leadership pathways, decentralising candidate selection, and allowing younger voices to shape policy priorities.

Adapt or become irrelevant
The challenge before political parties is no longer simply attracting young voters through social media content, campaigns or symbolic outreach. The real question is whether entrenched political structures are willing to meaningfully share power and adapt to a new democratic culture shaped by honesty, participation, transparency, responsiveness, and decentralised influence over scripted authority. Young citizens are no longer waiting quietly at the edges of democracy. They are already reshaping it. The street protest and the polling booth are no longer separate democratic spaces; they are increasingly interconnected. Political parties that continue to underestimate this transformation risk finding themselves stranded in a political culture that no longer exists.

Emerging Political Trends

- Political communication is becoming:
 - More interactive
 - Less hierarchical
 - Issue-centric
 - Citizen-driven
- Digital narratives increasingly influence election campaigns and policy debates.
- Political parties are investing heavily in digital outreach and data-driven campaigning.

Challenges

- Low representation of youth in legislatures and party leadership.
- Limited internal democracy within political parties.
- Rising concerns regarding:
 - Fake news
 - Deepfakes
 - Misinformation
 - Political polarization
 - Algorithmic manipulation of public opinion.

Static Linkages

- Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of Speech and Expression.
- Article 19(1)(b) – Right to Assemble Peacefully.
- Article 19(1)(c) – Right to Form Associations.
- Article 324 – Election Commission of India.
- Article 326 – Universal Adult Suffrage.
- Representation of the People Act, 1950 & 1951 – Electoral framework.
- 61st Constitutional Amendment Act, 1988 – Reduced voting age from 21 years to 18 years.
- 73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts – Strengthen grassroots democratic participation.
- National Youth Policy, 2014 – Youth empowerment and participation in nation-building.
- Digital India Programme – Promotes digital governance and citizen engagement.
- Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) – Recommends participatory and citizen-centric governance.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens participatory democracy.
- Enhances electoral accountability.
- Encourages issue-based political discourse.
- Improves citizen engagement in governance.
- Increases transparency through digital scrutiny.
- Facilitates informed public debate.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- A recent editorial highlights the growing political influence of India's youth, particularly through digital platforms and changing patterns of political participation.
- The article argues that youth are no longer merely future voters but are actively shaping electoral politics, public discourse, and political communication.
- Political parties are increasingly adapting their campaigns to appeal to digitally connected young voters, who prioritize accountability, transparency, and issue-based politics over traditional political rhetoric.

Key Points

Youth Demographic Advantage

- National Youth Policy (2014) defines youth as persons aged 15–29 years.
- India possesses one of the world's largest youth populations, making youth a crucial electoral and developmental stakeholder.
- India is expected to remain one of the youngest major economies over the coming decades, offering a significant demographic dividend.

Changing Nature of Political Participation

- Shift from conventional political campaigns to digital-first political engagement.
- Major platforms influencing political discourse:
 - Social media (X, Instagram, YouTube)
 - Podcasts
 - Online discussion forums
 - Citizen journalism
- Youth increasingly participate through:
 - Digital campaigns
 - Public consultations
 - Social movements
 - Electoral participation

Concerns

- Spread of misinformation and fake news.
- Echo chambers and political polarization.
- Digital divide affecting equitable participation.
- Weak internal democracy in political parties.
- Limited youth representation in legislative institutions.
- Risk of populism driven by social media trends.

Way Forward

- Strengthen internal democracy in political parties.
- Promote greater youth representation in legislatures and political leadership.
- Enhance digital literacy to combat misinformation.
- Ensure transparency in political advertising on digital platforms.
- Encourage issue-based civic education in schools and universities.
- Bridge the digital divide through universal digital access.
- Institutionalize youth participation in policymaking through consultative mechanisms.
- Strengthen the Election Commission's oversight of digital election campaigns.

India-U.S. defence tech ties — big ambitions, little delivery

India-U.S. defence cooperation has acquired an unenviable reputation in strategic circles for generating ambitious political announcements that fail to translate into industrial outcomes. Over the past two decades, successive administrations in New Delhi and Washington have unveiled defence technology partnerships and industrial collaborations promising to transform bilateral military ties, only for them to become bogged down in protracted negotiations, export-control restrictions, technology-transfer disputes and differing commercial expectations.

The irony is that the relationship itself has expanded considerably. Since 2002, India has acquired over \$22 billion worth of U.S. defence equipment, including Apache and Chinook helicopters, C-17 and C-130J transport aircraft, P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, and M777 howitzers. While the US has become a major defence supplier, meaningful co-production and technology transfer remain elusive.

The case of the GE engine
The recent impasse over General Electric's (GE) F414 fighter engine, once hailed as the centrepiece of bilateral defence cooperation, is merely the latest — and arguably the most significant — illustration of the gap between political declarations and industrial outcomes. The estimated cost of each F414 engine has reportedly nearly tripled, rising from around ₹70 crore-80 crore to over ₹200 crore. GE has also sought an Indian investment of around \$800 million (₹7,576 crore) to establish a dedicated production line.

Disagreements over technology transfer, intellectual property and export controls have further complicated negotiations. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited is negotiating procurement and licensed manufacture of the F414 for the Tejas Mk-II, while the Defence Research and Development Organisation and Aeronautical Development Agency are separately engaging GE over the same engine for the proposed Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) and the Indian Navy's Twin-Engine Deck-based Fighter. The result is a web of interlinked negotiations proving difficult to resolve.

The F414 programme was unveiled during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2023 Washington



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visit as the flagship achievement of the Initiative for Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), intended to symbolise a shift from a buyer-seller relationship towards genuine defence-industrial collaboration. Instead, it has become another illustration of the enduring gap between political ambition and industrial reality. Nor is this an isolated instance.

Vision to stagnation

The first serious attempt to institutionalise defence cooperation came in 2012 with the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI). Conceived to promote co-development and co-production, it generated years of meetings but delivered no significant military capability before fading into irrelevance.

Its successor, iCET (2022), expanded the agenda to semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, telecommunications, space, biotechnology, drones and resilient supply chains. Among its principal defence initiatives was the GE F414 programme, whose unresolved negotiations have become emblematic of the wider difficulty in translating political ambition into industrial outcomes.

The India-U.S. Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X), launched in 2023 to link defence start-ups, academia and industry, likewise generated enthusiasm but has yet to produce noteworthy co-development outcomes. Other prospective collaborations have fared little better. Discussions on co-producing the Javelin anti-tank guided missile have remained unresolved for more than a decade, while the proposed collaboration on the General Dynamics Stryker infantry combat vehicle has suffered a similar fate. Both now appear increasingly likely to be shelved quietly.

Even India's 2024 acquisition of 31 MQ-9B SkyGuardian and SeaGuardian remotely piloted aircraft from General Atomics through the U.S. government's Foreign Military Sales route for around \$3.5 billion has resembled a purchase rather than the industrial collaboration originally envisaged. Its promised package — including local assembly, partial manufacture and a domestic maintenance, repair and overhaul ecosystem — has yet to materialise.

Taken together, these outcomes reveal a pattern that is difficult to ignore. Successive

India-U.S. defence initiatives have been heralded as "historic", "transformational" or "game-changing", yet implementation has repeatedly fallen well short of the rhetoric.

The technology transfer divide

At the heart of this disconnect lie fundamentally different philosophies underpinning the two countries' defence sectors. India views defence partnerships as a means of acquiring advanced technologies, strengthening indigenous manufacturing and reducing dependence on imported material.

The U.S., by contrast, regards advanced defence technologies as strategic assets governed by stringent export-control regulations, particularly the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), under which the release of technical data and manufacturing know-how remains subordinate to broader security considerations.

The unresolved F414 negotiations illustrate this divide. India has sought manufacturing expertise and intellectual property to build long-term domestic capability, while the U.S. remains constrained by export-control regimes regardless of Washington's broader strategic objectives. The consequence is a defence relationship that has matured as a procurement partnership but far less as a mechanism for transferring capability and strengthening India's *aatmanirbharta*.

Despite the undeniable expansion of India-U.S. strategic ties — marked by increasingly sophisticated military exercises, logistics agreements and enhanced interoperability — the industrial dimension of the relationship has yet to keep pace. The alphabet soup of DTTI, iCET and INDUS-X has largely disappointed, leaving officials in both countries looking to the proposed Reciprocal Defence Procurement Agreement (RDPA) as the next test of industrial cooperation.

The U.S. believes that the RDPA could reshape bilateral defence trade by granting reciprocal access to each other's procurement markets. Yet, that reciprocity could expose India's still nascent defence manufacturers to direct competition with America's larger, wealthier and technologically more advanced defence giants. Whether this creates genuine balance or simply institutionalises unequal competition is another matter altogether.

- INDUS-X (2023): Defence innovation partnership connecting start-ups, industry and academia.
- Foundational Defence Agreements LEMOA (2016) – Logistics support.
- COMCASA (2018) – Secure communications.
- BECA (2020) – Geospatial intelligence sharing.
- Upcoming Initiative Reciprocal Defence Procurement Agreement (RDPA) aims to provide reciprocal access to defence procurement markets.

Static Linkages

- Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP), 2020 prioritises indigenous procurement through Buy (Indian-IDDm).
- Defence Production & Export Promotion Policy (DPEPP), 2020 aims to strengthen indigenous defence manufacturing.
- DRDO is India's premier defence R&D organisation.
- HAL is India's leading aerospace manufacturer.
- India allows 74% FDI (Automatic Route) and 100% through Government Route in defence manufacturing under specified conditions.
- Defence Industrial Corridors:
 - Uttar Pradesh
 - Tamil Nadu

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Enhances India's strategic partnership with the U.S.
- Improves interoperability between armed forces.
- Provides access to advanced defence technologies.
- Supports Indo-Pacific maritime security.

Challenges

- Limited technology transfer due to U.S. ITAR (International Traffic in Arms Regulations).
- Dependence on foreign defence platforms.
- Delays in co-development projects.
- High costs and IP-related disputes.
- Slows India's defence indigenisation goals.

Way Forward

- Strengthen indigenous aero-engine development.
- Promote joint R&D with assured technology transfer.
- Expand private sector participation in defence manufacturing.
- Reduce dependence on imported critical technologies.
- Ensure balanced provisions in RDPA to protect Indian defence industry.
- Accelerate implementation of DAP 2020 and Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiatives.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The GE F414 fighter engine co-production deal between General Electric (U.S.) and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has faced delays over technology transfer, intellectual property (IP), export controls, and cost escalation.
- The issue highlights the persistent gap between India-U.S. strategic cooperation and actual defence industrial collaboration.
- It has renewed focus on India's objective of Aatmanirbhar Bharat in Defence.

Key Points

- India-U.S. Defence Trade: Defence trade has grown from near zero (2008) to over US\$22 billion.
- Major U.S. acquisitions include:
 - Apache AH-64E helicopters
 - Chinook CH-47 helicopters
 - C-17 Globemaster III
 - C-130J Super Hercules
 - P-8I maritime patrol aircraft
 - M777 Ultra-Light Howitzers
- GE F414 Engine Proposed for:
 - LCA Tejas Mk-II
 - Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA)
 - Twin Engine Deck Based Fighter (TEDBF)
- Key issues:
 - Technology transfer
 - Intellectual Property (IP) rights
 - Export control restrictions
 - Cost escalation
- Major India-U.S. Defence Initiatives DTTI (2012): Promote defence technology cooperation and co-development.
- iCET (2022): Cooperation in AI, semiconductors, quantum technology, defence, space and telecom.

Meaningful defence technology collaboration continues to elude the United States and India

Steady in turbulence

India must build partnerships in this age of global turmoil

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visits to Australia and New Zealand marked yet another step in India's efforts to consolidate partnerships across the Indo-Pacific. India's relations with both countries have traditionally been largely economic and people-centric, but the visits underscored an increased emphasis on strategic aspects, a fresh turn. Geopolitical competition, manifested in supply-chain disruptions and the realignment of global economic networks, is keeping the world on tenterhooks, and India has to manage the uncertainties and volatility well to be able to protect its vital interests. The visits reflected New Delhi's attempt to strengthen the southern arc of the Indo-Pacific under its Act East Policy, MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) vision, and commitment to a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. India and Australia adopted a new Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation, significantly upgrading the existing security framework. They agreed to enhance interoperability between their armed forces, expand military exercises, establish an Annual Defence Ministers' Dialogue, and strengthen cooperation in cybersecurity, maritime security and emerging technologies. An India-Australia Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap was unveiled to deepen information sharing and operational coordination in the Indo-Pacific. An immediate and consequential outcome was Australia's decision to allow uranium exports for India's civilian nuclear programme, removing a lingering obstacle in ties and boosting India's clean-energy ambitions. Both countries will also find new avenues of cooperation on critical minerals, a specific field of global uncertainty.

India-New Zealand relations are now a formal strategic partnership, with a road map for cooperation over the next four years. Key agreements announced by the countries include maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and mutual logistics support between the Indian Navy and the New Zealand Defence Force. Building upon the recently concluded India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, both sides agreed to aim for a substantial expansion of bilateral trade by 2030. Avenues for agricultural cooperation are also being explored. India shares with Australia and New Zealand a concern about maintaining stability and predictability in the Indo-Pacific. Supply-chain diversification, energy security, and access to critical minerals and emerging technology are key priorities for India, which is trying to protect its strategic autonomy in a world of great volatility. The Modi government has been trying to achieve this objective through building a network of partnerships. These visits fit into that pattern. India's challenge is in keeping itself steady in an era of global turmoil, and untangled from rivalries that can do it no good. Mr. Modi's visits build on this awareness.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- PM Narendra Modi visited Australia and New Zealand to deepen India's strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific.
- Focus areas included defence cooperation, maritime security, critical minerals, clean energy, trade and resilient supply chains.
- The visits align with Act East Policy, MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) and India's vision of a Free, Open and Inclusive Indo-Pacific (FOIP).

Key Points

India-Australia

- Adopted a Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation.
- Agreed to:
 - Enhance armed forces' interoperability.
 - Expand military exercises.
 - Establish an Annual Defence Ministers' Dialogue.
 - Strengthen cooperation in maritime security, cybersecurity and emerging technologies.
- Launched the India-Australia Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap.

- Australia agreed to export uranium for India's civilian nuclear programme.
- Expanded cooperation in critical minerals (Lithium, Cobalt, Rare Earth Elements), renewable energy and resilient supply chains.

India-New Zealand

- Elevated ties to a Formal Strategic Partnership.
- Adopted a four-year cooperation roadmap.
- Agreed on:
 - Maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
 - Mutual logistics support between the Indian Navy and New Zealand Defence Force.
- Targeted substantial growth in bilateral trade by 2030 under the India-New Zealand FTA.
- Cooperation to expand in agriculture, food processing, education and innovation.

Strategic Significance

- Strengthens India's role in the southern Indo-Pacific.
- Enhances maritime security, critical mineral security, and supply chain resilience.
- Reinforces India's Strategic Autonomy through diversified partnerships.

Static Linkages

- Act East Policy (2014): Strategic and economic engagement with the Indo-Pacific.
- MAHASAGAR: India's vision for maritime security, connectivity and regional development.
- Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI, 2019): Focuses on maritime security, connectivity, disaster management and marine ecology.
- UNCLOS (1982): Legal framework for maritime zones, navigation and ocean governance.
- Quad: India, Australia, Japan and the US cooperate on maritime security, critical technologies and resilient supply chains; it is not a military alliance.
- Australia is a major producer of uranium, lithium and rare earth elements.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Expands India's strategic footprint in the Indo-Pacific.
- Improves defence interoperability and maritime cooperation.
- Secures uranium and critical minerals for energy transition.
- Diversifies supply chains and strengthens strategic autonomy.

Challenges

- Balancing ties amid US-China rivalry.
- Timely implementation of agreements.
- Continued dependence on imported critical minerals.
- Managing Indo-Pacific geopolitical tensions.

Way Forward

- Expedite defence and maritime agreements.
- Build long-term partnerships for critical minerals.
- Enhance maritime domain awareness and information sharing.
- Expand cooperation in AI, cybersecurity and emerging technologies.

For Iran's third republic, America is the defining question



RAJA MANDALA
BY C RAJA MOHAN

BARELY A week after Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was laid to rest in Mahad, Iran and the United States are trading blows again. The collapse of the ceasefire and the intensification of military hostilities in the Gulf is a reminder that the "third republic" now emerging in Tehran is being forged in the crucible of war and peace with America.

Iran's internal rearrangement after Khamenei cannot be separated from its prolonged conflict with the US. The nature and terms of engagement with Washington have become the principal fault line in the struggle to shape the new political order in Iran. The Indian foreign policy community must come to terms with post-Khamenei Iran entering a period of internal restructuring and external reorientation, with important consequences for India's interests in the Middle East and beyond. It must also pay more attention to the internal debates in Iran on the nation's future.

For nearly four decades, Khamenei stood at the apex of a state that combined clerical authority with the expanding power of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The transition to a new order was bound to be contested. The American-Israeli military campaigns of 2002 and 2020, culminating in

year war with Iraq and rebuilt the Islamic Republic into a more resilient and centralised state. Domestic dissent was tightly regulated, while the Revolutionary Guard developed into one of the country's most powerful military, political, and economic institutions.

Externally, Khamenei's Iran pursued influence across the Middle East through proxies such as Hezbollah and Hamas, invested heavily in military capabilities, and presented itself as the principal centre of resistance to American and Israeli power. The result was a formidable regional presence, but also a deepening economic crisis at home and strained ties with most Gulf Arab neighbours.

The burial of Khamenei marks the symbolic end of Iran's second republic and the uncertain beginning of a third. Every revolutionary state eventually reaches a point where preserving the state matters more than perpetuating the revolution at home and promoting it abroad. Iran may now have arrived at that moment.

For realists, the question is about the nature and degree of change in Iran, not the inevitability of it. Iran's relationship with America sits at the heart of the unfinished Iranian debate on the organising principles of the third republic.

The first republic under Khomeini was defined by revolution. The second under Khamenei consolidated the expansion of the Revolutionary Guards, and sustained resistance to the United States. The third, if it takes shape, will almost certainly be defined by how it answers the American question — whether to persist with confrontation or negotiate a

durable accommodation.

That Iran was negotiating with Washington within weeks after the assassination of the Supreme Leader and that talks were going on over the last weekend even amid the mounting military tensions show the difficulty of abandoning the engagement with America. They also show how hard it is to generate an Iranian internal consensus on the engagement with the United States.

Within Iran, hardliners want revenge — in the form of "Jashn-e Tammuz" for the killing of late Khamenei and the continuation of the war against America. Moderates defend the negotiations with the US by calling them a different form of war. Pragmatists argue that a permanent confrontation with America is bankrupting Iran and is unsustainable. The factional lines of the third republic are being drawn around this divide — over the nature, sequence, and the terms of engagement with the US. Beyond the establishment are those that demand an end to the Islamic Republic.

The Islamic Republic was born in revolt against America, and consolidated under Khamenei through resistance to Washington. Tehran is now in the throes of deciding whether its third incarnation of the Islamic Republic can be built on an accommodation with America. The resolution of that issue, in whatever form, will shape the geopolitics of the region and generate new imperatives for India's Middle East policy.

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Relevance for India

- India has important strategic interests in Iran through:
 - Chabahar Port
 - International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)
 - Energy security
 - Maritime trade in the Persian Gulf
- Any instability may affect:
 - Global crude oil prices.
 - Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.
 - India's trade and supply chains.

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman.
- Nearly one-fifth of global petroleum consumption passes through the Strait of Hormuz (EIA).
- Chabahar Port provides India access to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing Pakistan.
- INSTC is a multimodal corridor connecting India-Iran-Russia-Europe.
- India follows a policy of Strategic Autonomy in West Asia by maintaining balanced relations with Iran, Israel, GCC countries and the U.S.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Political transition may reshape West Asian geopolitics.
- Possibility of renewed diplomacy on Iran's nuclear programme.
- Stability would support regional trade and energy security.

Challenges

- Leadership uncertainty.
- Risk of escalation between Iran, Israel and the U.S.
- Disruption of maritime trade through the Strait of Hormuz.
- Volatility in global oil markets.
- Increased uncertainty for India's connectivity projects.

India's Concerns

- Secure energy imports.
- Safety of Indian shipping and diaspora.
- Operationalisation of Chabahar Port and INSTC.
- Maintaining strategic balance among competing regional powers.

Way Forward

- Continue India's multi-alignment and strategic autonomy.
- Strengthen engagement with all stakeholders in West Asia.
- Expedite development of Chabahar Port and INSTC.
- Diversify crude oil import sources.
- Enhance maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Support peaceful resolution of disputes through diplomacy and international law.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Iran is undergoing a major political transition following the reported assassination of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei amid renewed military confrontation with the U.S. and Israel.
- The transition has intensified internal debates over Iran's future political system, nuclear policy, sanctions, and relations with the U.S.
- The evolving situation has significant implications for India's energy security, connectivity projects, maritime security, and West Asia policy.

Key Points

Political Developments

- Iran's political system is based on the principle of Velayat-e-Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist).
- The Supreme Leader is the highest constitutional authority and exercises control over:
 - Armed Forces
 - Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)
 - Judiciary
 - State media
 - Key constitutional appointments
- The current transition has intensified competition among:
 - Hardliners (support confrontation with the U.S.)
 - Moderates (support negotiations)
 - Pragmatists (prioritise economic revival and sanctions relief)

Strategic Issues

- Future of Iran's nuclear programme.
- U.S. sanctions and prospects of sanctions relief.
- Security of the Strait of Hormuz.
- Iran's regional influence through proxy groups.

Relations with Gulf countries and major powers.

One deletion and cascading civil disabilities



JOHN BRITTAS

WHEN A nation turns alien to one of its own, it does so not with conquest but with the quiet stroke of a pen. R Rajagopal, former editor of *The Telegraph*, watched his name vanish from West Bengal's electoral rolls in a routine revision, stripping him of his vote and stalling his passport.

The furore over the denial of his passport (which he eventually received), and the remarks by Bombay High Court judge Madhav Jamdar affirming the fundamental right to protest, have brought in some fresh air. Yet the warning remains. The state that begins by forgetting its people on paper can end by making them strangers in their own land.

Every constitutional democracy must revise its electoral rolls. Every sovereign nation must verify the credentials of those to whom it issues passports. Every statute has its own purpose, every authority its own jurisdiction and every administrative process its own legal consequences. What should concern us is when the consequence of one statutory process begins to migrate into different legal domains, producing disabilities that Parliament never contemplated and the governing statute never authorised.

The Constitution deliberately fragments public power. That is one of liberty's most effective safeguards. The Passport Authority administers the Passports Act. The Election Commission administers the Representation of the People Act. Citizenship is governed by the Citizenship Act. Income tax authorities administer fiscal legislation. Each functions within defined legislative boundaries. The rule of law depends as much upon this institutional separation as upon judicial review itself. The concern arises when the boundaries begin to dissolve.

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) was conceived as an electoral exercise to improve the accuracy of electoral rolls. It was never intended to become a parallel mechanism for regulating passports, licences, welfare benefits or other civil rights. The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) was conceived as an electoral exercise to improve the accuracy of electoral rolls. It was never intended to become a parallel mechanism for regulating passports, licences, welfare benefits or other civil rights. The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) was conceived as an electoral exercise to improve the accuracy of electoral rolls. It was never intended to become a parallel mechanism for regulating passports, licences, welfare benefits or other civil rights.

the consequences of an electoral exercise begin to migrate into statutory fields for which Parliament has prescribed entirely different legal frameworks. Suppose electoral exclusion starts affecting passport renewal. Tomorrow it may influence professional licences, public employment, banking, taxation, education, welfare entitlements or even the right to file a writ petition before the Supreme Court (SC)—not because Parliament has legislated such consequences, but because one administrative authority begins relying upon another's conclusions without independently applying the statute it administers.

Administrative law has long resisted this. SC's decision in *Maneka Gandhi* transformed passport administration by insisting that restrictions on personal liberty must satisfy standards of fairness, reasonableness and due process. The judgment constitutionalised administrative discretion itself. Public authorities may no longer act mechanically. They must independently apply the law governing them. If deletion from the electoral roll becomes sufficient to deny passport renewal, an electoral exercise acquires consequences never contemplated by the Passports Act. The issue then becomes a question of constitutional method.

The danger, therefore, is not that one journalist may temporarily remain without a passport. The greater danger is the emergence of what may be called a "cascade of civil disabilities" where the consequence of one administrative process travels across multiple statutory regimes until a single determination begins to shape rights.

That is why the present controversy deserves attention far beyond the immediate facts. It is not fundamentally about passports. It is about preserving the constitutional discipline that every public authority must remain faithful to the statute it administers, every restriction upon liberty must have legislative authority, and every citizen is entitled to have his rights determined by law, not by the unintended spillover of administrative decisions.

(with inputs from Anvesh Babu)

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SIR was conceived as an electoral exercise to improve the accuracy of electoral rolls. It was never intended to become a parallel mechanism for regulating passports, licences, welfare benefits or other civil rights.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The issue arose after concerns that deletion of an individual's name from the electoral roll during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) reportedly affected passport renewal.
- It has raised questions on whether findings under one statutory process (electoral rolls) can be used by another authority (Passport Authority).
- The debate concerns rule of law, administrative accountability, due process and protection of fundamental rights.

Key Points

- Special Intensive Revision (SIR): Conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to update and purify electoral rolls.
- Electoral rolls are prepared under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
- Passport issuance and renewal are governed by the Passports Act, 1967.
- Citizenship is governed by the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- Deletion from the electoral roll does not amount to loss of citizenship.
- Every statutory authority must independently exercise powers under its own law.
- Administrative decisions affecting rights must follow principles of natural justice and due process.

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before law; protection against arbitrariness.
- Article 21 – Right to life and personal liberty; procedure must be fair, just and reasonable.
- Article 324 – Superintendence, direction and control of elections vested in the Election Commission.
- Article 326 – Elections based on universal adult suffrage.
- Representation of the People Act, 1950 – Preparation and revision of electoral rolls.
- Representation of the People Act, 1951 – Conduct of elections.
- Passports Act, 1967 – Passport issuance and regulation.
- Citizenship Act, 1955 – Acquisition and termination of citizenship.
 - Natural Justice Right to be heard (Audi Alteram Partem)
 - Reasoned administrative decisions
 - Rule against bias
- Important Judgment: *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978) – Expanded Article 21; administrative actions affecting liberty must be fair, just and reasonable.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Periodic electoral roll revision improves electoral integrity.
- Removes duplicate and ineligible entries.
- Strengthens free and fair elections.

Challenges

- Risk of wrongful deletion of eligible voters.
- Administrative errors may affect democratic rights.
- Possibility of one statutory process influencing another without legal sanction.
- Need to balance electoral integrity with protection of civil liberties.

Way Forward

- Ensure independent decision-making by each statutory authority.
- Strengthen notice, hearing and appeal mechanisms before deletion from electoral rolls.
- Improve transparency and accuracy in electoral revisions.
- Prevent administrative spillover across different statutory regimes.
- Strict adherence to constitutional principles and natural justice.

Between Iran blackmail and Trump bullying

WEST ASIA has once again descended into open conflict. For a third consecutive day, the United States launched strikes on Iran, and Tehran targeted US allies and commercial tankers, even as oil prices climbed to their highest level in a month. The June 14 Memorandum of Understanding, which established a ceasefire while allowing 60 days for negotiations on a broader settlement — almost half of which have gone by — has effectively collapsed. Days after Ali Khamenei's funeral, Iran has once again closed the Strait of Hormuz, while President Donald Trump has reinstated the US blockade. The rest of the world finds itself caught between Iran's dangerous blackmail and the Trump administration's perilous unilateralism.

President Trump's now-revoked plan of a 20 per cent fee on cargo transiting the Strait of Hormuz flagrantly contradicts repeated assurances of senior members of his own administration, including Vice President J.D. Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, that no country can levy tolls or fees on an international waterway under international law. Such a charge would more than double the cost of shipping oil through the Strait. Arguably, Trump's threat also underscores the paucity of Washington's options in dealing with an Iranian regime unwilling to relinquish its chokehold over Hormuz. In retrospect, the US-Iran MoU's ambiguity over control of the Strait was far from being an oversight — it reflected irreconcilable positions that have set off the second major burst of violence since it was sealed. Tehran appears convinced that control over the Strait is the last and most potent card it has left to play, and is therefore determined to prevent the emergence of alternative routes that could erode that leverage. Its strategy of deterring ships from using US-coordinated alternatives will only sabotage the trust that is needed for a durable end to the hostilities.

Iran and the US do not need to become friends. They do, however, need to establish a minimum framework for engagement that does not crumble with every tug or pull. The consequences of failing to create such a baseline are regional and global: Civilians and seafarers continue to pay with their lives — one Indian crew member has been killed and one is missing after Iranian cruise missiles struck their tankers — while repeated disruptions to the Strait threaten energy supplies and global economic stability. No ceasefire can survive if the players slide back into belligerence and brinkmanship quite so easily.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The US-Iran ceasefire (14 June MoU) has collapsed before completion of the 60-day negotiation period.
- Iran has again threatened/closed the Strait of Hormuz, while the US has intensified military and economic pressure.
- Attacks on commercial tankers have disrupted maritime trade and increased crude oil prices.
- The crisis has significant implications for global energy security, freedom of navigation, and India's energy imports.

Key Points

- Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint.
- It connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- It is bordered by Iran (North) and Oman (South).
- Around 20% of global petroleum liquids consumption passes through the Strait. (US Energy Information Administration)
- Major oil exporters using the Strait:
 - Saudi Arabia, Iraq, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Iran
- Any disruption leads to:
 - Rise in global crude oil prices
 - Increase in shipping and insurance costs
 - Inflationary pressures
 - Supply-chain disruptions

- India imports a major share of its crude oil from the Gulf region; hence, Hormuz is strategically important for India's energy security.

Static Linkages

- UNCLOS, 1982 Recognizes Transit Passage through international straits used for international navigation.
- Coastal States cannot suspend transit passage.
- Energy Security Diversification of crude oil sources.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR).
- Indian Ocean Region (IOR) Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) are vital for India's trade and energy imports.
- Blue Economy Safe and secure maritime trade is essential for sustainable economic growth.

Critical Analysis

Importance

- Ensures uninterrupted global energy supply.
- Maintains freedom of navigation.
- Critical for India's crude oil imports.
- Vital for stability of global trade.

Concerns

- Rising oil prices may widen India's Current Account Deficit (CAD).
- Imported inflation and higher fiscal burden.
- Threat to Indian seafarers and merchant vessels.
- Increased geopolitical instability in West Asia.

Way Forward

- Promote diplomatic resolution through multilateral engagement.
- Uphold UNCLOS and freedom of navigation.
- Diversify India's energy import sources.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Strengthen maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Develop alternative energy and trade corridors.

Rising inflation complicates RBI's choice

RETAIL INFLATION has continued to edge upwards, according to the latest data, driven, in part, by the food, transportation and restaurant segments. CPI inflation stood at 4.38 per cent in June, up from 3.93 per cent the month before. This brings inflation in the quarter to 3.9 per cent. While this is marginally lower than the central bank's most recent projection of 4.2 per cent — this is also the last inflation reading before the August meeting of the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee — the MPC's decision isn't likely to be as straightforward as it may seem.

Disaggregated data shows that food inflation rose to 5.32 per cent, up from 4.78 per cent the month before, with ginger, tomato and raisin witnessing high inflation. But the outlook for food prices remains unclear. The cumulative rainfall in the current monsoon season from June 1 has been 19.3 per cent below normal. This has had an impact on kharif sowing, with overall acreage down 16 per cent from last year. The sowing window is closing. And as El Niño strengthens, the situation is uncertain, complicating matters for the MPC. Alongside the rise in food prices, the sharp increase in inflation in the transport segment reflects the petrol and diesel price hikes — June witnessed the full impact of the mid-May price hikes — while the increase in food and energy prices is finding its way to the restaurant category. Some analysts expect the pass through of higher input and fuel prices into prices of other non-food items to exert further upward pressure, even if gradually.

In its last meeting, the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee had maintained status quo on both rates and stance. While crude oil prices have fallen off the highs thereafter, renewed hostilities in West Asia have complicated matters — over the last five days, Brent crude oil has edged up 7.5 per cent. Much will depend on how MPC members view the external and internal risks to growth and inflation. Global central banks have already begun to react. In its June meeting, the European Central Bank had raised interest rates. Its next decision will be announced next week. The US Fed is also scheduled to hold its meeting later this month. Their decisions will indicate the direction of monetary policy in developed economies.

- Nominal Anchor: CPI (Combined).
- CPI released by: National Statistical Office (NSO), MoSPI.
 - Monetary Policy Committee (MPC): 6 members (3 RBI + 3 Central Government nominees).
 - Decisions by majority vote.
 - RBI Governor has a casting vote.
- Repo Rate: Main policy instrument to control inflation.
- Food has the highest weight (~46%) in CPI, making food prices the major driver of retail inflation.
- Core Inflation: CPI excluding food and fuel.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India's Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based retail inflation increased to 4.38% in June from 3.93% in May.
- Food inflation rose to 5.32%, driven by higher prices of tomato, ginger and raisins.
- The inflation data comes ahead of the RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting, making it crucial for interest rate decisions.
- Deficient monsoon, lower kharif sowing and rising crude oil prices due to West Asia tensions have increased inflationary risks.

Key Points

- Headline CPI Inflation (June): 4.38%
- Food Inflation: 5.32%
- Quarterly average inflation: 3.9% (below RBI projection of 4.2%)
- Monsoon rainfall (since June 1): 19.3% below normal.
- Kharif sowing: Around 16% lower than last year.
- Petrol and diesel price hikes increased transport inflation.
- Rising food and fuel costs are creating second-round inflationary effects.
- Brent crude oil prices rose about 7.5% amid renewed West Asia conflict.

Static Linkages

- Inflation Target: $4\% \pm 2\%$ (2%-6%) under the Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT) framework.
- Legal Basis: RBI Act, 1934 (amended in 2016).

Critical Analysis

Challenges

- Rising food inflation due to deficient monsoon.
- Lower kharif sowing may reduce agricultural output.
- Higher crude oil prices increase imported inflation.
- Rising transport costs may push up overall inflation.
- RBI faces a trade-off between controlling inflation and supporting growth.

Opportunities

- Inflation remains within RBI's tolerance band.
- Timely monetary policy and supply-side measures can contain inflationary pressures.
- Better monsoon performance in the remaining season can improve food supply.

Way Forward

- Monitor monsoon and kharif sowing closely.
- Improve supply-chain and buffer stock management.
- Strengthen irrigation and climate-resilient agriculture.
- Diversify crude oil import sources.
- Continue calibrated monetary policy based on incoming data.