

# India co-sponsors resolution passed by UNSC against Iran

The resolution demands the 'immediate cessation of all attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran' on GCC countries; India prioritises the safety of 'all civilians', says Ministry in wake of criticism over unbalanced responses on conflict in West Asia

**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

India has prioritised the safety of "all civilians", the government said on Wednesday in an effort to deflect criticism that it had only condemned Iran's actions, and not those by the U.S. and Israel in the ongoing war in West Asia.

On Wednesday, India co-sponsored a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) resolution at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) along with 134 countries that demanded the "immediate cessation of all attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran" against GCC countries Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan. The resolution was passed with 13 UNSC members voting in favour while Russia and China abstained.

It condemned "any actions or threats by the Islamic Republic of Iran aimed at closing, obstructing, or otherwise interfering with international navigation through the Strait of Hormuz".

"The resolution reflects



**RANDHIR JAISWAL**  
MEA spokesperson

several of our positions," said Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal at a weekly press briefing on Thursday.

"We have a large diaspora in the GCC countries, and their well-being and welfare are of utmost importance. The Gulf is also very important for our energy security needs,"

Mr. Jaiswal added, in references to about 10 million Indians who live and work in West Asia, and India's energy purchases from the region that make up about 50% of its crude oil and 90% of its liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) imports.

In contrast, there are about 9,000 Indians in Iran and India has discontinued its energy imports from Iran since 2019, under threat of U.S. sanc-

tions. The Indian support for the UNSC resolution comes on the heels of a number of statements by the Ministry condemning specific Iranian actions such as the attacks on various countries across the West Asian region, buildings in Dubai, Omani facilities and a Thai ship bound for India.

## U.S.-Israeli actions

However, India has not similarly condemned the attacks by the U.S. and Israel on Iran, in which an estimated 1,255 people have been killed, including Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, his family and advisors; the sinking of Iranian ship *IRIS Dena* in the Indian Ocean that had been hosted for exercises by India; or the

bombing of a school in Mubn in which 150 schoolgirls are believed to have been killed. Nor has India or the GCC-led resolution spoken about Israel's strikes on Lebanon, where the government said more than 630 people have been killed, and 8,00,000 displaced from their homes.

To a question from *The Hindu* about the seemingly unbalanced responses, Mr. Jaiswal said that the MEA had issued statements, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had made *suo motu* statements in both Houses of Parliament that regretted the loss of lives.

"As far as the question of the schoolchildren is concerned... we have issued several statements on the ongoing conflict. We have underlined the need for prioritising the safety of all civilians. We regret the precious lives lost, and express our grief in that regard," Mr. Jaiswal said.

In the past few days, India's "silence" on U.S. and Israeli actions has come in for criticism from a number of senior former diplomats speaking to the media and at various public events.

"Diplomacy should recognise complexity, not reduce it to a single culprit," former Indian Foreign Secretary and former Ambassador to the U.S. Nirupama Menon Rao said on Thursday in a post referring to the Ministry of External Affairs statement, suggesting that India's sponsorship of the UN resolution would "endorse a narrative that begins the story with Iranian retaliation rather than the escalation that preceded it".

In an interview to news agency ANI, former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal said India should have issued a statement condoling the death of Ayatollah Khamenei "to recognise that the head of state contrary to norms of international law has been politically assassinated".

Speaking about the March 4 submarine torpedo attack that sank the *IRIS Dena* "very close to India shores", former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said that India must assert itself in the face of U.S. actions. "Tactical subterfuge can easily result in strategic irrelevance," he added.

# Crude supply secure, no shortage of fuel: Minister

Amid West Asia crisis, foremost priority is to provide cooking gas to households, says Petroleum Minister Puri in LS; 20% of average monthly commercial requirement to be allocated by oil firms

**Sandeep Phukan**

NEW DELHI

**T**here is no shortage of petrol, diesel, kerosene, and aviation turbine fuel in the country, Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri informed the Lok Sabha on Thursday, adding that India's crude oil supply has been secured amid the conflict in West Asia.

The Minister was responding to a notice submitted by Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on the shortage of liquid petroleum gas (LPG).

"This is not the moment for rumour-mongering or fake narratives. India is navigating the most severe global energy disruption in recorded history," Mr. Puri said. It is the "foremost



Customers wait at a fuel station in Chennai on Thursday as rumours of fuel shortage triggered massive panic-buying. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

priority" of the government that the kitchens of over 33 crore families, especially the "poor and the underprivileged, do not face any shortage" of gas, and domestic supply is fully protected, he said.

The Centre has also introduced regulation of commercial LPG cylinders to prevent hoarding and diversion, the Minister said.

"In a major decision, 20% of the average monthly commercial LPG requirement will be allocated from today by OMCs [oil-marketing companies], in coordination with the State governments so that there is no hoarding or black-marketing," Mr. Puri said.

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## India co-sponsors UN resolution condemning Iran

NEW DELHI

India has co-sponsored a resolution at the United Nations Security Council that condemned actions by Iran aimed at interfering with navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. » PAGE 13

## Modi discusses West Asia crisis with Pezeshkian

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday spoke to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and expressed concern over the 'serious situation' in West Asia. » PAGE 13

# Crude supply secure, no shortage of fuel: Puri

Commercial LPG is sold in a “fully deregulated over-the-counter market without subsidy, registration, booking, or purchase limits” that can let a buyer procure “cylinders in any quantity” Mr. Puri said. Without restriction, such bulk purchase “could have been diverted to the grey market at the expense of genuine commercial consumers and domestic households alike”, he said.

He noted that field reports of shortage indicate “hoarding and panic-booking at the distributor and retail level, driven by consumer anxiety rather than any actual supply shortage”.

Raising concerns about India’s energy security, Mr. Gandhi had alleged that the Narendra Modi government had “bartered” the right to determine its relationship with different oil suppliers with the U.S. because of a “compromise”. The Congress leader said there is widespread panic about LPG, restaurants are closing, street vendors are affected and that “the pain has just started”.

Mr. Gandhi, however, could not complete his speech as he sought to draw certain inferences about Mr. Puri which was disallowed by Speaker Om Birla who said the Opposition leader should have given prior notice before making any allegation on the floor of the House.

Subsequently, the Petroleum Minister informed the Lok Sabha that India was importing approximately 60% of its LPG requirements from the Gulf countries before the start of the conflict but have diversified its supply chains since then. “Procurement has now been actively diversified, with cargoes being secured from the U.S., Norway, Canada, Algeria, and Russia, in addition to available Gulf sources,” he said amid constant sloganeering from the Opposition members.

*(With inputs from Saptaparno Ghosh)*

IN FIRST STATEMENT AS NEW SUPREME LEADER, MOJTABA KHAMENEI VOWS TO AVENGE DEATHS

# Strait of Hormuz to remain closed, shut US bases or attacks continue: Iran leader

As oil tops \$100 a barrel again, more Iran drones head to Persian Gulf countries

Parisa Hafezi  
Dubai, March 12

IRAN WILL fight on and keep the Strait of Hormuz shut, new Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei said on Thursday in a statement read out on state television, the first remarks attributed to him since he succeeded his slain father.

In a defiant address, Khamenei said Iran's neighbours should close all US bases on their territory, which Iran would continue to attack. "I assure everyone that we will not neglect avenging the blood of your martyrs," he said.

"The popular demand is to continue our effective defence and make the enemy regret! The lever of blocking the Strait of Hormuz must continue to be used," he said of the shipping route, where a fifth of global oil normally runs past Iran's coast.

No images have yet been released of Khamenei since the strike that killed his father, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

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Liberia-flagged tanker Shenlong, carrying Saudi crude, arrives in Mumbai Thursday after transiting the Strait of Hormuz. Another tanker also reached Mumbai and is headed to Paradip. AP

## Delhi in talks with Tehran to let fuel ships bound for India transit Strait

### Another Indian killed in attack on US-owned tanker

Shubhajit Roy  
New Delhi, March 12

DELHI IS in talks with Tehran to let India-bound fuel ships transit the Strait of Hormuz, closed by the Iranian military following

the outbreak of war in West Asia. "External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Foreign Minister of Iran Seyed Abbas Araghchi have had three conversations in the last few days. The last one discussed issues

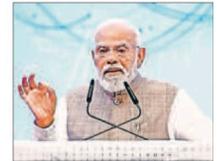
pertaining to safety of shipping and India's energy security. Beyond that, it would be premature for me to say anything," Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for the Ministry of External »CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## PM speaks to Pezeshkian: Deep concern over loss of lives, escalation of tensions

Shubhajit Roy  
New Delhi, March 12

IN HIS first conversation with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian since the start of the war in West Asia 13 days ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi discussed Thursday the "serious situation" in the region and expressed "deep concern over the escalation of tensions and the loss of civilian lives as well as damage to civilian infrastructure".

In a post on X following the phone call, Modi said he "urged



PM Narendra Modi at the NXT Summit 2026 in New Delhi, Thursday. PTI REPORT, PAGE 8

for dialogue and diplomacy" and "reiterated India's »CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## LPG supply hit, Govt pushes kerosene & coal as options

Sukalp Sharma  
& Jatin Anand  
New Delhi, March 12

AMID GROWING concerns over liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) or cooking gas supplies in the country, which have been hit due to the West Asia conflict, the government is activating other fuel options like kerosene, fuel oil, biomass and even coal to ease pressure on LPG for

commercial users like restaurants and hotels.

The government has also decided to allocate for commercial use 20% of the average monthly commercial LPG requirement; this will be done in coordination with state governments. Moreover, as a demand management measure amid panic booking by household consumers, the minimum gap between cylinder

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# Strait of Hormuz to remain closed: Iran leader

Iranian officials have said the younger Khamenei was lightly wounded. He said in his address that his wife, sister and other family members were also killed.

Khamenei's remarks reinforce the message from Iran that its strategy now is to impose a prolonged economic shock to force Trump to back off. A spokesperson for Iran's military command said on Wednesday that the world should prepare for oil prices of \$200 a barrel.

Thursday's surge in oil prices came despite the announcement the previous day

that developed countries would release 400 million barrels of oil from their strategic reserves, nearly half from the US.

That is by far the biggest-ever coordinated intervention into the oil markets. But releasing the reserves will take months, and account for just three weeks of supply from the blockaded strait. "The only way to see oil prices trade lower on a sustained basis is by getting oil flowing through the Strait of Hormuz," ING analysts said. "Failing to do so means that the market highs are still ahead of us."

Shortly after his address, the Revolutionary Guards an-

nounced that, in keeping with his orders, they would keep the Strait shut. Two tankers were ablaze in an Iraqi port on Thursday after a hit by suspected Iranian explosive-laden boats, a step-up in attacks that have cut off oil from the Middle East. The attacks were a clear sign of defiance of US President Donald Trump, who said on Wednesday the US had already won the war.

Images verified by *Reuters* as having been filmed from the shore of the port of Basra showed ships engulfed in massive orange fireballs that lit up the night sky. At least one crew member was killed in the

attacks.

Hours earlier, three other ships had been struck in the Gulf. Iran's Guards claimed responsibility for at least one of those attacks, on a Thai bulk carrier that was set ablaze, which the Guards said had disobeyed their orders. Another container vessel reported being struck by an unknown projectile near the UAE on Thursday.

Oil prices soared back above \$100 a barrel, having come down earlier in the week when Trump said the war would be over soon.

Iran has said it will not let oil through the Strait until the US-Israeli attacks cease. **REUTERS**

# As oil tankers burn, Iran says ships can pass Strait if they 'coordinate with us'

More Iranian drones seen flying into Iraq, Kuwait and UAE

Reuters  
Dubai, Hebron, March 12

MANY SHIPS can still pass through the Strait of Hormuz if they coordinate with the Iranian navy, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said in comments carried by *Mehr* news agency.

"After the current events, generally we cannot return to conditions before February 28 (start of current Iran war)...as we have understood how important the safety of the Strait of Hormuz is, and so did the others," the spokesperson added.

Oil prices rose about 8% on Thursday as Iran stepped up attacks on oil and transport facilities across West Asia, and the country's supreme leader said the closure of the vital Strait of Hormuz should continue. Brent futures were up 8% at \$99.38 at 1655 GMT, pulling back from a session high of \$101.59. US Energy Secretary Chris Wright told *CNBC* on Thursday that the US Navy could not escort ships through the Strait of Hormuz now but it was "quite likely" that could happen by the end of the month. Global oil prices are unlikely to hit \$200 a barrel, Wright said, even as Iran continues to strike merchant ships.

Two tankers were ablaze at an Iraqi port on Thursday after

a hit by suspected Iranian explosive-laden boats, a step up in attacks that have cut off oil from the Middle East and defied Donald Trump's claim to have won the war he launched two weeks ago.

Images verified by *Reuters* as having been filmed from the shore of the port of Basra showed ships engulfed in massive orange fireballs that lit up the night sky, after the attacks which Iraqi authorities blamed on Iranian boats. At least one crew member was killed.

Lebanon's Iran-backed militia Hezbollah fired its biggest volley of rockets into Israel of the war, prompting fresh Israeli strikes on Beirut.

## Trump says 'We Won'

US President Donald Trump, whose Republican Party is trying to hold on to Congress in an election later this year, has repeatedly tried to calm energy markets this week by saying the surge in oil prices will be short-lived.

But he has not explained how the war will end, or presented a plan to reopen the blockaded strait. US and Israeli officials say the aim is to destroy Iran's missile and nuclear programmes, but Trump has also demanded Iran's "unconditional surrender" and the power to determine its leaders.

"You never like to say too early you won. We won," Trump told a campaign-style rally in Hebron, Kentucky, on Wednesday. "In the first hour it was over." The United States had "virtually destroyed Iran", he said. But he added: "We don't want to leave early, do we? We got to finish the job."



An oil tanker burns after being hit by an Iranian strike in the ship-to-ship transfer zone at Khor al-Zubair port near Basra, Iraq, late Wednesday. AP

## Israel strikes heart of Beirut as it widens evacuation warnings in southern Lebanon

Reuters  
Beirut, March 12

ISRAELI AIRSTRIKES hit a building in the heart of Beirut on Thursday and Israel ordered residents out of another swathe of southern Lebanon, intensifying its offensive against the Iran-backed Hezbollah group.

The airstrike at around 5:30 pm hit a building in the Bachoura neighbourhood, around 1 km from the Lebanese government's Grand Serail headquarters in downtown Beirut.

Before the strike, the Israeli military issued a warning tell-



Smoke rises after Israeli strikes on southern suburbs of Beirut, Lebanon, on Thursday. REUTERS

ing residents they were near a Hezbollah facility against which it intended to action.

Israel launched an air and

ground offensive last week against Hezbollah, which launched attacks at Israel on March 2 that it said aimed to avenge the killing of Iran's supreme leader at the start of the US-Israeli war on Iran.

Hezbollah has fired rockets and drones at Israel every day since, including its largest barrage late on Wednesday that triggered heavy Israeli strikes on Beirut's southern suburbs.

Israel has pounded Lebanon's south and east and the capital's southern suburbs, killing more than 600 people, according to Lebanese authorities.

It has also ordered mass evacuations in those same areas, pushing more than 800,000 people out of their homes.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said the military had been instructed to expand its operations in Lebanon. "We promised quiet and security to the communities of the north, and that is exactly what we will deliver," he said at a meeting with senior military officials.

Israel's military has warned residents of a large area of southern Lebanon to leave their homes, saying it would act "forcefully" against Hezbollah.

# PM speaks to Iranian President, discusses situation in West Asia

**Press Trust of India**

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday night spoke to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian over the phone and discussed the “serious situation” in West Asia.

Mr. Modi expressed deep concern over the escalation of tensions in the region and the loss of civilian lives as well as damage to civilian infrastructure.

The Prime Minister told the Iranian President that the safety and security of Indian nationals, along with the need for unhindered transit of goods and energy, remain India’s top priorities.

“Had a conversation with Iranian President, Dr Masoud Pezeshkian, to discuss the serious situation in the region. Expressed deep concern over the escalation of tensions and the loss of civilian lives as well as damage to civilian infrastructure,” Mr. Modi



Narendra Modi

said in a post on social media platform X.

The Prime Minister also reiterated India’s commitment to peace and stability and urged dialogue and diplomacy to end the crisis.

Mr. Modi earlier spoke to the leaders of Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, Israel and Qatar, and expressed concern over the attacks on their countries, and condemned the violation of some nation’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

He had also discussed the security of the Indian community residing in those countries.

# Delhi in talks with Tehran to allow India-bound fuel ships pass Strait

Affairs, said Thursday.

Sources indicated that since the talks are underway, it is still “work in progress”.

With maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz halted, India’s LPG imports have been significantly impacted. The country depends on imports to meet around 60% of its LPG requirement, and 90% of its LPG imports come from West Asia through the Strait. This effectively means that roughly 55% of India’s LPG consumption volumes are currently unavailable.

Meanwhile, an Indian crew member of a US-owned oil tanker was killed after the vessel came under attack in the waters near Iraq’s Basra — the third Indian seafarer to die in the ongoing war.

Confirming the death of the seafarer, the Indian embassy in Iraq said 15 other Indian crew members of the ship were evacuated.

“On March 11, 2026, a US-owned crude oil tanker, Safesea Vishnu, sailing under the Marshall Islands flag, was attacked near Basra, Iraq, in which one Indian crew member unfortunately lost his life,” the Indian embassy in Iraq said on social media. “The remaining 15 Indian crew have since been evacuated to a safe place,” it said.

Extending its “deepest condolences to the family members of the deceased crew member”, the embassy said it was in regular contact with Iraqi authorities and the rescued Indian sailors and was offering them all possible assistance.

With an India-bound ship coming under attack from suspected Iranian fighters, Delhi Wednesday “deplored” the targeting of commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.

Jaiswal also said that Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives have reached out to India for energy supplies.

“India is a major exporter of refined petroleum products, especially to our neighbourhood. We have received a request from the Government of Bangladesh for supply of diesel, which is being examined. Given our people-centric and development-oriented approach to relations with Bangladesh, we have been supplying diesel from the Numaligarh Refinery (in Assam) since 2007 through various modes which includes waterways, rail, and later through the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline. A sale-purchase agreement was signed in October 2017 between Numaligarh Refinery and Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation for supply of high-speed diesel on mutually agreed terms.”

“It bears mention that while diesel exports to Bangladesh have largely continued since 2017, India’s refining capacity, our own requirements, and diesel availability will be factored in while making decisions. In addition, I would also like to say that we have received such requests from several other countries including Sri Lanka and Maldives, and these are being examined taking into account our own energy requirements and availability that we have,” he said.

# New Supreme Leader of Iran vows to keep Strait of Hormuz shut

Stanly Johny

In his first public comments since becoming Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei on Thursday asked neighbouring Arab countries to shut U.S. bases "as soon as possible", demanded reparations for the material losses during the war, and vowed to keep the Strait of Hormuz "closed".

"We will exact reparations from the enemy, and if it refuses, we will seize from its assets as much as we deem necessary and if that too proves impossible, we will destroy an equivalent portion of its assets," Mr. Khamenei said.

Pledging to avenge "the blood of the martyrs", Mr. Khamenei said the "effective and regret-inducing defence" by Iranian forces would continue. "Furthermore, the leverage of blocking the Strait of Hor-



Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei

muz must certainly continue to be used," he said.

Earlier in the day, President Masoud Pezeshkian set three conditions for ending the war. "The only way to end this war – ignited by the Zionist regime and U.S. – is recognising Iran's legitimate rights, payment of reparations, and firm guarantees against future aggression," the President said.

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**THREATS EXCHANGED**

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# Supreme Leader vows to keep Hormuz shut

The number of ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz, the critical maritime chokepoint connecting the Persian Gulf with the Arabia Sea through which roughly 20% to 34% of world's oil passes through, has come down to single digits in recent days as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has targeted cargo vessels in the Gulf waters. There were also reports that the Strait is being mined by the Guards.

“The countries of the region must clarify their stance regarding the aggressors against our dear homeland and the killers of our people,” Mr. Khamenei, who is yet to make a public appearance since his appointment as the country's top leader, said, referring to Persian Gulf monarchies that were targeted by Iranian missiles and drones since the war began. “I recommend that they shut down those bases as soon as possible; for they must surely have realised by now that America's claim of establishing security and peace has been nothing but a lie.”

Mr. Khamenei, according to Iranian officials, was injured in the U.S.-Israeli strike on February 28 that killed his father and former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, but is “safe and sound”. He thanked Iran's non-state allies such as Hezbollah, and said additional fronts would be opened “in areas where the enemy has negligible experience” if the “state of war persists”.

# Reports of Iran allowing Indian ships through strait are 'premature', says govt.

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**

NEW DELHI

The Ministry of External Affairs on Thursday said it was rather “premature” to discuss reports about India receiving permission for ships to cross the Strait of Hormuz.

“External Affairs Minister and Foreign Minister of Iran have had three conversations in the last few days. The last one discussed issues pertaining to safety of shipping and India’s energy security. Beyond that, it would be premature for me to say anything,” said Randhir Jaiswal, official spokesperson of the Ministry.

As oil tankers and cargo ships were attacked by suicide boats, drones and missiles, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar spoke with his Iranian counterpart, Seyed Abbas Araghchi, on Tuesday.

“Iran’s Foreign Minister reminded that the insecure situation and problems arising for shipping in the Persian Gulf are a result of the aggressive and destabilizing actions of the United States, and the international community must hold the U.S. accountable for this situation,” the Iranian



One of the cargo ships that was attacked in the Strait of Hormuz was Thai-flagged *Mayuree Naree*, which was headed for India. AP

Foreign Ministry had said after a call.

Cargo ships continued to be targeted in the strait even as India and Iran remained connected at the ministerial level. A Thai-flagged ship, *Mayuree Naree*, was hit near the Iraqi port of Basra on Wednesday that led to the death of one Indian sailor. The ship was headed for Kandla port in Gujarat.

## MEA’s statement

Following the incident, the Ministry said, “India deplores the fact that commercial shipping is being made a target of military attacks in the ongoing conflict in West Asia. Precious lives, including of Indian citizens, have already been lost in multiple such attacks in the earlier phase of

this conflict and the intensity and lethality of the attacks only seems to be increasing.”

India has been expressing concern about the targeting of merchant navy ships that are stuck both inside the Gulf as well as in the Gulf of Oman near the Strait of Hormuz.

Government sources have been maintaining that Indian sailors make for a large number of sailors in such ships and Iran’s attacks endanger their lives.

Already, at least four Indian sailors have been killed in attacks since the beginning of the war on February 28.

Apart from that, at least 20 other Indian sailors have been injured in multiple attacks on ships, sources have said.

# Crude supply secure, no shortage of fuel: Minister

Amid West Asia crisis, foremost priority is to provide cooking gas to households, says Petroleum Minister Puri in LS; 20% of average monthly commercial requirement to be allocated by oil firms

**Sandeep Phukan**

NEW DELHI

**T**here is no shortage of petrol, diesel, kerosene, and aviation turbine fuel in the country, Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri informed the Lok Sabha on Thursday, adding that India's crude oil supply has been secured amid the conflict in West Asia.

The Minister was responding to a notice submitted by Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on the shortage of liquid petroleum gas (LPG).

"This is not the moment for rumour-mongering or fake narratives. India is navigating the most severe global energy disruption in recorded history," Mr. Puri said. It is the "foremost



Customers wait at a fuel station in Chennai on Thursday as rumours of fuel shortage triggered massive panic-buying. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

priority" of the government that the kitchens of over 33 crore families, especially the "poor and the underprivileged, do not face any shortage" of gas, and domestic supply is fully protected, he said.

The Centre has also introduced regulation of commercial LPG cylinders to prevent hoarding and diversion, the Minister said.

"In a major decision, 20% of the average monthly commercial LPG requirement will be allocated from today by OMCs [oil-marketing companies], in coordination with the State governments so that there is no hoarding or black-marketing," Mr. Puri said.

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## India co-sponsors UN resolution condemning Iran

NEW DELHI

India has co-sponsored a resolution at the United Nations Security Council that condemned actions by Iran aimed at interfering with navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. » PAGE 13

## Modi discusses West Asia crisis with Pezeshkian

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday spoke to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and expressed concern over the 'serious situation' in West Asia. » PAGE 13

# 'U.S. intelligence indicates that Iran govt. is not at risk of collapse any time soon'

**Reuters**

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON

U.S. intelligence indicates that Iran's leadership is still largely intact and is not at risk of collapse any time soon after nearly two weeks of relentless U.S. and Israeli bombardment, according to three sources familiar with the matter.

A "multitude" of intelligence reports provide "consistent analysis that the regime is not in danger" of collapse and "retains control of the Iranian public," said one of the sources, all of whom were granted anonymity to discuss U.S. intelligence findings.

The latest report was completed within the last few days, the source said. With political pressure building over soaring oil costs, President Donald Trump has suggested he will end the biggest U.S. military operation since 2003 "soon". But finding an acceptable end to the war could be difficult if Iran's hardline leaders remain firmly entrenched.

The intelligence reporting underscores the cohesion of Iran's clerical leadership despite the killing of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Febru-



Rescue workers gather outside a damaged residential building in Tehran as residents collect their belongings on Thursday. AFP

ary 28, the first day of the U.S. and Israeli strikes. Israeli officials in closed discussions also have acknowledged there is no certainty the war will lead to the clerical government's collapse, a senior Israeli official said.

The sources stressed that the situation on the ground is fluid and that the dynamics inside Iran could change.

## Shifting objectives

Since launching their war, the U.S. and Israel have struck a range of Iranian targets, including air defenses, nuclear sites, and members of the senior leadership.

The Trump administration has given varying reasons for the war. In announcing the beginning of

the U.S. operation, Mr. Trump urged Iranians to "take over your government," but top aides have since denied that the objective was to oust Iran's leadership. In addition to Khamenei, the strikes have killed dozens of senior officials and some of the highest-ranking commanders in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Still, the U.S. intelligence reports indicate that the IRGC and the interim leaders who assumed power after Khamenei's death retain control of the country.

It is unclear how the current U.S.-Israeli military campaign would topple the government.

It would likely require a ground offensive, said the source.

# Is India tailing the U.S. in its West Asia policy?

PARLEY

A major war has erupted in West Asia, with Israel, the U.S., and Iran locked in direct conflict. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Israel just before the conflict, along with the U.S., attacked Iran. **India has not condemned the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.** Meanwhile, the war has resulted in rising energy prices, economic risks, and put at risk the safety of hundreds of thousands of Indian families in the region. **Is India tailing the U.S. in its West Asia policy?** Talmiz Ahmad and Kabir Taneja discuss this question in a conversation moderated by Smriti Sudesh. Edited excerpts:

**How is India's response to the Israel-U.S.-Iran war affecting its energy, economy, and citizens' safety?**

**Talmiz Ahmad:** Given India's long-term stakes in regional peace, energy security, trade, investment, connectivity projects, and the **welfare of 10 million Indians in the region,** the government's approach has been surprisingly detached.

Developments over the past two years, including Hamas attacks on Israel, a two-year war killing 72,000 people, and Israeli and U.S. strikes on Iran, should have demanded urgent attention. **India could have played a central role in urging restraint, but its response was half-hearted.** Our External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar did have one meeting with the GCC Foreign Ministers and also one meeting in January with the Arab League Foreign Ministers. But the sense of urgency and the sense that we have a collective view with regard to regional security, none of that appears to have emerged.

And, Mr. Modi's visit to Israel just before the conflict sent signals of affiliation. In moments of significant strategic churn, we do not take sides. You should keep your options open.

**Iranian drones and missiles have struck Gulf territories. They have actively intercepted these threats but have explicitly ruled out direct military participation in the war. How sustainable is this stance?**

**Kabir Taneja:** Most Gulf countries are currently **framing their actions as purely defensive.** They seem to be very careful not to use terminology such as "war" or indicate any offensive position they want to take. They have made it very clear that they are only taking down projectiles that have been launched against them. However, cracks are emerging in their air defences.

If they shift to an offensive posture and strike targets in Iran, they would be seen as joining



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu during a press conference in Jerusalem on February 26, 2024.

Israel and the U.S. against Iran. That is not something that is going to be palatable in the long term for the Gulf countries themselves.

If this conflict prolongs in the manner in which it is continuing right now, it will become unsustainable for them to react in the way they are currently reacting. They could face shortages of air defences if such attacks persist for a continuous period.

**Modi's Israel visit occurred just before the joint Israeli-U.S. strikes, and India has not condemned the killing of Khamenei. Does this indicate that India is taking a side?**

**TA:** Mr. Modi's visit to Israel and his warm engagement with the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, and his speech at the Knesset, indicate that Mr. Modi followed his heart. **He believed that Israel needs India now.** You could also argue that this emotional bonding with Israel could be justified on security and strategic grounds. Israel, at the end of the day, is a major supplier of security-related technology and defence equipment to us.

However, strategic ambiguity can sometimes serve national interests better than openly signalling a one-sided affiliation on the eve of conflict.

**India's relationship with Iran has historically been friendly. But as Tehran faces sustained air strikes, New Delhi has maintained silence. What does it say about the current state of India-Iran ties?**

**KT:** Many believe India's bilateral trade with Iran seems limited beyond oil and the Chabahar Port project, making it appear that economic ties are mainly transactional.

From an Indian point of view, our relationship with Iran is strategically very critical because of the work that we can do with them on issues such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, and now of course with connectivity to Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Given this strategic significance,



Most Gulf countries are currently framing their actions as purely defensive. They seem to be very careful not to use terminology such as "war" or indicate any offensive position they want to take

**KABIR TANEJA**

it is somewhat perplexing that India has not been able to use certain terms such as "protection of sovereignty" and similar language when discussing what has taken place in Iran, including the assassination of Khamenei. There have been top-level conversations. Also, Mr. Jaishankar alluded to the fact that there have been difficulties in reaching President Masoud Pezeshkian as well. At present, it is very muddled.

**To what extent does the U.S. influence India's policy towards West Asia?**

**TA:** Beyond the already complex state of global affairs, we now face a significant source of unpredictability and aggression in the persona of U.S. President Donald Trump. He has allowed himself to be manipulated by Mr. Netanyahu.

It is in this background that we have to evaluate how India has dealt with the region and the U.S. President. **Mr. Modi engaged with Mr. Trump in February, believing that he could pick up where he left off at the end of Mr. Trump's first term.** Several things went wrong.

First, he imposed huge tariffs upon us. Then we had the issue of penal tariffs relating to Russian oil sales. Then we had to negotiate the CETA, which by most accounts turned out to be quite one-sided.

Mr. Trump also expected India to publicly credit him for "brokering" the India-Pakistan ceasefire. I suspect in his heart of hearts, **he believes that the Nobel Prize denied to him is largely on account of India not giving him the plaudits that he felt he deserved.** And that has made him hostile to India and to Mr. Modi.

When Mr. Modi told the Finnish President that "war does not solve anything", that message should have been conveyed in Washington and Tel Aviv as well. Besides the murder of large numbers of civilians, which has now become an Israeli habit, they have created a very serious crisis: energy crisis, economic crisis and threats to the life and livelihood of millions of our people.

**What is the current outlook for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)?**

**KT:** It has not really moved forward since it was announced. The October 7 Hamas terror attack against Israel was a fundamental institutional blow to IMEC. Prior to that, there was some positivity about at least beginning discussions on how it could be constructed as a trade corridor.

**But since the Gaza crisis, it has been almost completely absent from government agendas.** It continues to be discussed in Track-Two dialogues and research circles, but at the government level, there is no one particularly keen on pushing that project forward right now. With the current crisis taking place, it has been pushed even further to the back of everyone's mind. From an academic point of view, it is easy to draw lines across countries and say a corridor can run through here or there. But if capital and business are not interested in using it, there is no point. Right now, we are seeing a level of instability in the Gulf that we have not witnessed in a long time.

As far as IMEC is concerned, it is definitely on the back burner at this point of time.

**What is your overall assessment of the trajectory of this war?**

**TA:** Talking about the regional scenario after the war is difficult at this stage. My hope is that they are able to bring a ceasefire into play very soon.

In conflicts like this, the Americans may need to intervene to end the fighting. Unlike post-9/11 U.S. interventions, there is no immediate crisis now, and Iran's weapons programme shows no evidence of revival. Then what is this war about?

Mr. Trump had encouraged a dialogue with the Iranians. They had three rounds of dialogue. **There is every evidence that Iran's approach was extraordinarily constructive.** But despite this, Mr. Trump went to war.

The future of Israel is uncertain because it is connected with the fortunes of Mr. Netanyahu. He has always put his personal fortunes ahead of the national interest. It remains to be seen what the attitude of the Israeli people is, whether they are in a forgiving mood and uphold him as 'Mr. Security' once again.

West Asia lacks a platform for serious security discussions. Track-two dialogues should pave the way for I.5-level engagement, eventually leading to government-to-government talks. India, China, Russia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam can play a significant role if they assume responsibility for facilitating constructive dialogue.



To listen to the full interview  
Scan the code or go to the link  
[www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com)

# In RS, MPs raise U.P. school closures, judicial diversity

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

Concerns over the state of public education in Uttar Pradesh, lack of social diversity in the higher judiciary, and the implications of permitting 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the insurance sector dominated Zero Hour in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

Raising the issue of school closures, Javed Ali Khan of the Samajwadi Party said the government's primary education network in Uttar Pradesh had been "nearly dismantled". Of the 4.18 lakh sanctioned teaching posts, 85,000 remain vacant, while 1.5 lakh Shiksha Mitras continue on low wages. He noted that 2,586 schools operate with single teachers, and around 27,000 schools have either been shut or merged.

Teachers, he said, are overburdened with non-academic duties ranging from Census and cattle counts to welfare scheme surveys, and in some States even managing stray cattle and dogs. Citing an order of the Allahabad



Proceedings under way in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday. ANI

High Court directing the government to relieve teachers of such additional tasks, he urged the Centre to ensure they are allowed to focus solely on teaching.

## **FDI in insurance**

P. Sandosh Kumar of the Communist Party of India called upon the government to reconsider the decision to allow 100% FDI in insurance, arguing that the sector safeguards the savings of millions and should not be left entirely to foreign capital. He warned that multinational firms might prioritise urban markets, sideline rural consumers, and endanger the livelihoods of thousands of insurance agents.

P. Wilson of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam revisited the issue of social diversity within the judiciary, renewing his demand for regional Benches of the Supreme Court of India.

He pointed out that of the 593 High Court judges appointed in the past five years, nearly 80% were from forward communities.

The Supreme Court currently has only one woman judge, two from religious minorities, one from the Scheduled Castes and none from the Scheduled Tribes.

Broader representation, he said, is essential to ensure the judiciary reflects India's social diversity.

# 21 Nagas freed amid tension over deaths of 2 Kukis in Manipur

**The Hindu Bureau**

GUWAHATI

The bodies of two Kuki men, missing after a shooting incident, were recovered from a jungle in Manipur's Kamjong district early Thursday morning, hours after 21 Tangkhul Naga people were released by their captors in the adjoining Ukhrul district, triggering fresh tension.

The Naga individuals, including women and children, were travelling on the Imphal-Ukhrul Road when a Kuki group intercepted their vehicles and held them captives on Wednesday.

This was reportedly in retaliation for an anti-poppy cultivation drive by "Naga volunteers" on Wednesday, after which two Kuki cultivators went missing while another sustained bullet injuries.

Ukhrul and Kamjong are Naga-dominated districts. Ukhrul town is about 80 km from Imphal.

District officials said the 21 Nagas were handed over to the Indian Army late on Wednesday night.

The post-release relief proved to be temporary when Kuki protesters blocked the Ukhrul-Imphal Road after the bodies of two of their tribesmen were found in a forested patch near Thawai Kuki village in Kamjong district. Thawai Kuki is about one km from Shangkai village, another affected village in Ukhrul district.

The duo went missing after "Naga volunteers" allegedly opened fire on Kuki villagers. While the Nagas claimed the incident occurred during a drive against poppy cultivation in the area, the Kukis said the firing was unprovoked.

**CM promises NIA probe**

In Imphal, Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh told the 60-member State Assembly that the government would hand over the case related to the death of the two people at Thawai Kuki village to the National Investigation Agency.

He also said that ex gratia would be provided to the families of the two deceased men.

# SC to study what constitutes 'personal data' in DPDP laws

Chief Justice of India says a balance has to be struck between privacy and the right to information; court issues formal notice to Union government and asks advocate to frame questions of law

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to examine what constitutes "personal data" under India's new digital personal data law, which is being accused of using data privacy norms to block the right to information.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said the need to define "public data" and "personal data" has arisen following the implementation of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 and its corresponding Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025.

The court issued formal notice to the Union government on a petition jointly filed by journalist Geeta Seshu and the Software Freedom Law Center, represented by senior advocate Indira Jaising and ad-



vocate Paras Nath Singh, who said the DPDP laws effectively stall journalists from accessing data of public interest concerning those who hold public offices.

"The term 'public interest' has been deleted from the DPDP Act. Journalists cannot access data which is in public interest. A journalist need not have personal data, but needs information which is in the public interest to satisfy the public's right to information and knowledge," Ms. Jaising submitted.

She said the Act does not clearly define terms such as "information" and "personal". The state

could mount sweeping surveillance on anyone, Ms. Jaising said.

She highlighted how the Act allowed compensation for illegally accessing personal data to go directly to the government and not the injured person.

"While the DPDP Act introduces a penalty-centric framework with fines running into hundreds of crores, such penalties are payable exclusively to the Consolidated Fund of India. The data principal whose privacy is violated receives no compensation, restitution or restoration, even in cases involving identity theft, financial fraud, reputational harm

or dignitary injury," the petition said.

The Chief Justice said a balance had to be struck between privacy and the right to information. One right should not compromise the other, the court said.

"At what point should data regarding a respectable person holding public office be treated as public and when should it be seen as personal," the CJI asked. The Chief Justice pointed out that an individual's data privacy has to be protected against sweeping provisions of law.

"Entire personal data of the citizenry from a substantial part of the globe are flowing into bigwig private entities. Data has become the true wealth of the day," Chief Justice Kant said.

The court asked Ms. Jaising to frame questions of law and scheduled the case for detailed hearing on March 23.

# Question CEC, but move to impeach is unwise

**T**HE IMPEACHMENT motion likely to be moved in Parliament by parties of the Opposition against Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar is not a step towards resolution of a political problem, but its disquieting symptom. Clearly, even a united Opposition does not have the numbers to carry the motion through. At best, therefore, it can use it to register a symbolic protest against what it sees as the EC's biased functioning — the draft motion cites his “partisan and discriminatory conduct” and “mass disenfranchisement” through the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls. The motion against CEC Kumar is set to come on the heels of a similar Opposition move against the Speaker — the no-confidence motion against Om Birla, seeking his removal for the alleged failure to ensure the House's impartial functioning, was rejected by a voice vote in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. In both cases, the Opposition is taking an extreme step to draw attention to the less-than-fair conduct of umpires. In both, there is merit in the Opposition's grievances. But it needs to ask itself whether by rushing to use an instrument of last resort to score only a symbolic point, it undermines itself, while risking a hardening of confrontation with a high-ranking constitutional authority.

To be sure, the EC has acted in ways that invite accusations of political bias on the watch of CEC Kumar. He has treated the Opposition with disrespect and the poll body's decisions have often handed the advantage to the ruling party. The conduct of the SIR in Bihar raised questions of pace and timing, setting off a scramble for hard-to-get documents and casting the burden of proof on the vulnerable voter in an exercise that morphed into a test of citizenship. But then, the Supreme Court stepped in, to nudge the EC towards greater transparency, to direct it to include Aadhaar as proof of identity, so that the SIR does not become an exercise of exclusion. Even amid the ongoing SIR ahead of elections in West Bengal, the SC intervention has tamped down the escalating confrontation between the Mamata Banerjee government and the EC — the Chief Minister called off her sit-in after the Court ordered the formation of tribunals to hear appeals against exclusion from voter lists.

Amid the polarisation, then, and in spite of an executive that weaponises its majority, there are countervailing forces, checks and balances. The Opposition needs to make its way by appealing to, and widening these spaces from within, strategically and imaginatively. No-confidence and impeachment motions are a cop-out, and an abdication of that responsibility.

# Women's political participation in India

While the turnout of women voters has increased over the years, campaign participation still shows a clear gender gap. The disparity in Parliamentary representation also remains wide, reflecting limited candidature, party nominations, and constraints on political autonomy.

## FULL CONTEXT

Sanjay Kumar  
Vibha Atri

### The story so far:

Women's relationship with electoral politics has undergone a profound transformation over the past six decades. Women today vote in numbers nearly equal to men, and in several State elections, even surpass them. Yet this remarkable rise in participation has not translated proportionately into representation or power. The Indian case presents a striking paradox: electoral inclusion without structural equality.

### Women as voters

In the decades after Independence, electoral participation showed clear gender disparities. Although women were formally included in the electoral process, their turnout remained significantly lower than that of men. In the 1967 Lok Sabha election, male turnout was 66.7 percent while female turnout was 55.5 percent—a gap of 11.2 percentage points (Chart 1). Similar disparities continued into the 1970s. In 1971, the gap widened slightly to 11.8 points. These patterns reflected structural constraints such as lower female literacy, restricted mobility, domestic responsibilities, and limited political outreach to women.

From the 1980s onward, the gap began to narrow steadily. By 2009 it had fallen to 4.4 percentage points. The most notable shift came in the last decade: in 2014 the gap dropped to 1.5 points, and in both 2019 and 2024 women voted at nearly the same rate as men.

A similar trend is evident in State Assembly elections between 1990 and 2025 (Chart 2). In the early 1990s, women's voter turnout was on average 4.5 percentage points lower than that of men. This gender gap narrowed steadily through the 2000s, falling to -1.8 percentage points during the 2005-07 elections and to -1 percentage point by 2008-10.

After 2011, the pattern reversed. Women began voting at slightly higher rates than men, with the average turnout gap turning positive at 1.1 percentage points during 2011-13 and widening to 2.82 percentage points in 2015-16.

## Winds of change

The data for the charts were sourced from the Women and Politics study conducted by Lokniti-CSDS

Chart 1: The year-wise difference between male and female voter turnout between 1967 and 2024 Lok Sabha elections

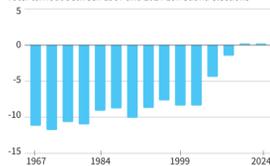


Chart 2: Average gender gap in State Assembly elections between 1990 and 2025

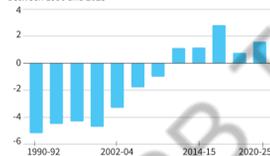


Table 3: Gender-wise participation in political activities over the years

Campaign activity	2009		2014		2019		2024	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Election meetings/rallies	9%	28%	15%	34%	14%	29%	16%	31%
Participation in processions	5%	20%	6%	15%	8%	14%	11%	18%
Participation in door-to-door canvassing	6%	17%	6%	14%	7%	13%	11%	19%

from about 5-6 percent to 11 percent, yet still lagged behind men. These trends suggest that while women are becoming more visible in public political activities, they have limited engagement in electoral campaigns.

A key factor limiting women's public political engagement is the need for family permission. The Lokniti-CSDS Survey on Women and Politics, conducted in 2019, shows that most women report requiring approval for activities such as attending rallies, candidate meetings, or campaigning



Table 4: The share of who said they needed permission to participate in select political activities (in %)

Activity	Need Permission Yes (%)
Attend a political rally	64
Attend a candidate meeting	62
Join a protest	63
Campaign for a candidate or party	61

Chart 5: Year-wise number of women MPs elected to the Lok Sabha

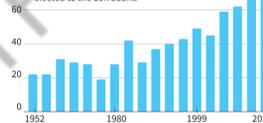


Chart 6: Gender-wise number of candidates in Lok Sabha elections

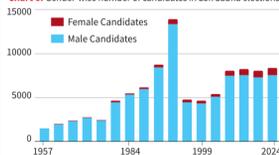


Chart 7: Success rate of male and female candidates in Lok Sabha elections (in %)

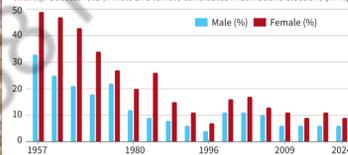


Chart 8: How women perceive having the same political views as their families (in %)

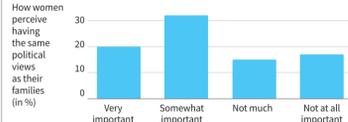


Table 9: The share of women who agree with the following statements about structural barriers (in %)

Statement	Agree (%)
Easier for woman with a political background to enter politics	58
Easier for woman from upper economic status to join politics compared to a woman from lower economic status	57
Parties routinely favour men over women, regardless of candidate merit	44
Voters are more likely to vote for men than women	44

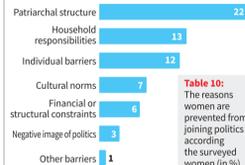


Table 10: The reasons women are prevented from joining politics according to the surveyed women (in %)

sharply to 599. In recent elections, female candidature has continued to expand—668 women contested in 2014, 726 in 2019, and 800 in 2024 (Chart 6). However, these numbers must be viewed in context: male candidates still number in the thousands. Women remain a small minority among the total contestants.

Political parties often justify limited nominations by arguing that women are less "electable." Yet success rate data complicates this claim. In 1957, 49 percent of women candidates won compared to

Beyond family and social constraints, women also face systemic obstacles within political institutions. Many perceive that political opportunities are not equally accessible. Data from the Lokniti-CSDS study on women and politics show that 58 percent of women believe it is easier for a woman from a political family to enter politics, while 57 percent feel that women from higher economic backgrounds have an advantage. Nearly half (44 percent) think that political parties prefer men when allocating tickets, and a similar

## THE GIST

Post Independence, electoral participation showed clear gender disparities. Although women were formally included in the electoral process, their turnout remained lower than that of men. From the 1980s onward, the gap began to narrow.



Chinese President Xi Jinping addresses the closing session of the National People's Congress at the Great Hall of the People, in Beijing on Thursday. AP

# Beijing adopts ethnic unity law that 'erodes' minority rights and cements assimilation

Associated Press  
Beijing, March 12

CHINA ADOPTED a sweeping law Thursday to promote what it calls "ethnic unity," a measure that critics say would further erode the rights of some minority groups as authorities cement a push toward assimilation.

The law, approved by the country's ceremonial legislature, is designed to foster "a stronger sense of community among all ethnic groups in the Chinese nation," said Lou Qinjian, a delegate to the National People's Congress who introduced the proposal to the whole body.

The proposed law lays out the need to promote ethnic unity by all government bodies and private enterprises, including local governments and state-affiliated groups like the All-China Women's Federation.

"The people of each ethnic group, all organizations and groups of the country, armed forces, every Party and social organization, every company, must forge a common con-

sciousness of the Chinese nation according to law and the constitution, and take the responsibility of building this consciousness," it reads.

Academics and observers say the new provision represents a setback for the identity of ethnic minorities because it mandates the use of Mandarin Chinese in compulsory education, among other things.

The majority of China's population is Han Chinese and the official language is Mandarin. The country has 55 ethnic groups, making up 8.9% of the 1.4 billion population.

The constitution states that "each ethnicity has the right to use and develop their own language" and "have the right to self-rule," while the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy promises limited autonomy to those groups, including allowing them to create flexible measures to develop their economy.

"It puts a death nail in the party's original promise of meaningful autonomy," said James Leibold, a professor at Australia's LaTrobe University.

# U.S. begins probing 'discriminatory trade policies' against India

Investigation against 16 economies, including India, bid to reimpose some sort of tariffs on trading partners once the stopgap 10% tariffs expire

**T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**  
NEW DELHI

The U.S. has announced investigations against 16 economies, including India, on whether actions or policies of these countries "are unreasonable or discriminatory and burden or restrict U.S. commerce", the office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer said on Wednesday.

These investigations would be under Section 301(b) of the Trade Act of 1974, which was one of the avenues U.S. President Donald Trump had said he would explore after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down his reciprocal tariffs on February 20.

Following the court's decision, Mr. Trump imposed a 10% tariff on imports from all countries for a period of 150 days. According to trade and industry experts, the fresh investigation is an attempt by the U.S. to reimpose some sort of tariffs on its trading partners once the stopgap 10% tariffs expire.

## 'Evidence' against India

According to the official order, there is apparently evidence of structural excess capacity and production in India. "In 2025, India had a bilateral trade surplus with the United States of \$58 bil-



India had created "significant excess capacity" in petrochem, steel, and other industries.

lion," the order said. "India's global goods trade surplus sectors include textiles, health, construction goods, and automotive goods. For example, evidence suggests the solar module sector is plagued by excess capacity, including that India's current module manufacturing is nearly triple annual domestic demand."

It added that India had created "significant excess capacity" in petrochemicals, steel, and other industries. "While its [the investigation's] impact on India's exports will be clear only after the investigation concludes, it seems the move is aimed at imposing a new tariff once the 150 days for the 10% global tariff expires," said Pankaj Chadha, chairman of the Engineering Exports Promotion Council of India.

He said this fresh development did not bode well for the Indian engineering

sector, given that the 50% tariff imposed by the Trump administration on items such as steel, aluminium, auto, and auto components remained in place.

The Confederation of Indian Textile Industry has said that the recent developments add further uncertainty to the textiles and apparel sector, which it said is already under significant stress due to the developments in West Asia and the lack of a clear picture of how the U.S. tariff situation will unfold.

According to Ajay Srivastava, founder of Global Trade Research Initiative think-tank and former Director General of Foreign Trade, the revival of Section 301 investigations signals that U.S. trade policy is entering a new phase following the Supreme Court ruling that curtailed Washington's tariff powers.

However, he noted that Section 301 proceedings are not as rapid as the reciprocal tariff system that Mr. Trump had been implementing through executive orders.

Besides India, the economies being investigated are China, the European Union, Singapore, Switzerland, Norway, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, South Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Mexico, and Japan.

# Feb inflation rises to 3.21%, Iran war impact yet to be felt

Siddharth Upasani  
New Delhi, March 12

INDIA'S HEADLINE retail inflation rate rose to 3.21% in February from 2.74% in January, data released on Thursday by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) showed.

The prices faced by consumers rose at a faster rate even before the US and Israel attacked Iran at the end of the month and the subsequent retaliation by Tehran that has seen energy prices surge.

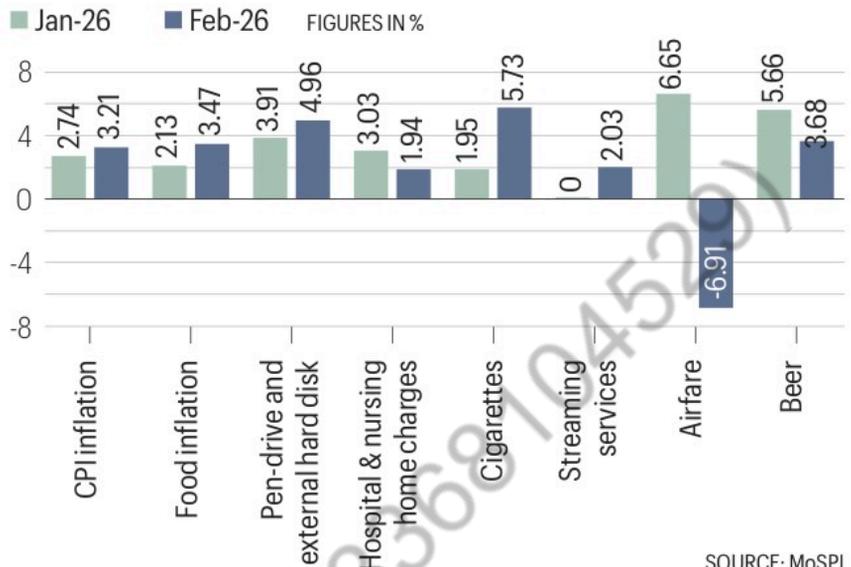
According to data released by the statistics ministry, the rise in inflation in February was driven by an unfavourable base effect as well as the continued rise in prices of gold (48% inflation) and silver jewellery (161%). Key food items such as tomato (45%) and cauliflower (44%) also saw a big jump in prices compared to last year, while a fall in prices of others such as onion (down 28%) and potato (down 18%) kept the rise in the headline inflation rate in check.

On the whole, food inflation rose to 3.47% from 2.13% in January. However, the food price momentum — or the month-on-month increase in food prices — was non-existent, with the Consumer Food Price Index down 0.2% in February compared to January, suggesting an unfavourable base effect helped drive up the year-on-year inflation rate.

The price momentum for all the items in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as a whole was minor, with the index up 0.1% from January.

“...the tobacco and intoxicants category also witnessed an uptick in inflation, driven by a sharp increase in excise duty on tobacco products. Mean-

## ● Early inflationary trends in new CPI series



SOURCE: MoSPI

Note: Inflation figures only for non-food items with significant change in Feb from Jan

while, core inflation remained stable at 3.4%, unchanged from the previous month. Excluding precious metals, core inflation stood significantly lower at 2.0%, indicating broadly contained underlying price pressures,” Rajani Sinha, Chief Economist at CareEdge Ratings, said.

The CPI data for February is the second inflation print under the updated inflation series which has a base year of 2024 for prices and updated consumption basket based on the 2023-24 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey.

Released last month, the new CPI inflation series has a lower weight of food and includes more goods and services than before, thus providing a more comprehensive and updated picture of the country's price situation.

If one counts the numbers as per the old CPI series, the February inflation rate of 3.21% is the highest in 11 months. However, one-to-one comparisons between inflation numbers between the old and

new series may not be appropriate. Further, even at 3.21%, CPI inflation remains under the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) medium-term target of 4% for the 13th month in a row, although the figure for February is likely irrelevant for the central bank given the global developments of March and how they have impacted prices.

“February does not consider the war effect and hence March inflation would reflect the initial impact in terms of higher fuel prices especially of LPG. We could expect March inflation to be in the same range of 3.2-3.5% based on observations in the market so far in the food domain,” said Madan Sabnavis, Bank of Baroda's Chief Economist. While global crude oil prices surged to \$120 per barrel earlier in the month following US and Israel's attack on Iran and its subsequent retaliation that involved shutting down Strait of Hormuz, prices have eased somewhat but remain highly volatile.

FULL REPORT ON  
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