

Opposition seeks discussion on impact of West Asia crisis

Members point to how the war has affected LPG, crude supplies and fertilizer production; Rijju says govt. was ready to work with Opposition, but noted that PM had made statement on the issue

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Monday witnessed a brief adjournment after the Opposition members insisted on a discussion on the West Asia crisis and its impact on India.

The issue was raised as soon as Zero Hour began at noon, with Congress member Manish Tewari urging the Chair to allow a discussion as there had been an escalation of hostilities between Iran and the U.S.-Israel combine.

“The Business Advisory Committee had discussed this issue. There should be a discussion on the situation in West Asia and the crisis with regard to LPG, crude oil, and fertilizers,” Mr. Tewari said.

After papers listed for the day were laid on the Table of the House, the Opposition members renewed their demand, leading to noisy scenes.

Responding to the protests, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju said



As protests from the Opposition continued, Speaker Om Birla adjourned the House for 15 minutes. ANI

the government was willing to discuss the matter with the Opposition. However, the Minister said it was important to discuss the issue of left-wing extremism (LWE) as Home Minister Amit Shah had declared that Maoist activities would end in the country by March 31, 2026.

He pointed out that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had already made a statement on the West Asia crisis in both Houses of Parliament.

Mr. Rijju said that whenever a crisis arises, all sides should stand together and avoid politicising the issue. He also assured the House that the government was ready to work with the Opposition.

However, as the protests continued, Speaker Om Birla adjourned the House for 15 minutes.

What is the plan?

Speaking to reporters within the Parliament premises, Congress MP Priyanka

Gandhi Vadra said a discussion was required because the crisis might worsen in the coming days.

“As this war escalates, there are indications that the crisis is going to worsen. We want to discuss so that we can find out solutions. The prices of gas cylinders have gone up; there may be shortage of petrol, diesel. So, we need to know the government’s planning and together we should find solutions,” Ms. Vadra said.

Centre eyes new regulation to cover social media users

It plans to amend IT Rules and allow I&B Ministry to send takedown notices to individual users for posts; Internet Freedom Foundation calls it 'massive expansion of unconstitutional censorship'

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

The Union government is planning to allow the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) to send takedown notices to individual users for their social media posts. Under the IT Rules, 2021, the Ministry could issue such notices only to on-line news platforms.

In addition, any advisories to social media platforms by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology would, if not complied with, affect the firms' so-called "safe harbour", allowing them to be held liable in court for users' content.

These changes have been put forth in a draft amendment on Monday to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, which were amended as recently as February.

In an explanatory memorandum to the proposed amendment, the IT Ministry said that the addition of individual user posts was a "[c]larification of applicability" of those rules to "news and current affairs



The amendments are clarificatory and procedural in nature and are intended to improve legal certainty, strengthen enforceability of Ministry directions, and ensure effective oversight of intermediary-hosted content, particularly news and current affairs

MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

content hosted by non-publisher users".

In a statement, Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF), an Indian digital rights advocacy organisation, decried the proposal as a "massive expansion of unconstitutional censorship and regulatory power".

The Ministry said these "amendments are clarificatory and procedural in nature and are intended to improve legal certainty, strengthen enforceability of Ministry directions, and ensure effective oversight of intermediary-hosted content, particularly news and current affairs."

IFF pushed back on that claim, pointing to a key change in the proposal - an inter-departmental committee (IDC) to hear ap-

peals against complaint outcomes, which broadened its mandate. "The original Rule 14(2) required the IDC to hear "complaints regarding violation or contravention of the Code of Ethics." "The amended version removes this requirement entirely. The IDC now hears: (a) grievances arising from decisions at Level I or II; or (b) "matters" referred to by the Ministry."

The government uses Section 79 of the IT Act, under which the IT Rules were notified, to warn social media platforms that content under a takedown notice, if retained, would lead to the loss of their safe harbour. Since February's amendment abruptly changed takedown time-

lines to retain safe harbour to two-three hours from 24-36 hours, Meta has been taking down more posts and accounts under such notices. Blocking orders that are more legally binding are issued under Section 69A.

IFF accused the Centre of trying to sidestep orders by the Madras and Bombay High Courts, which have stayed certain parts of the IT Rules. "The cumulative effect of the amendments to Rules 8 and 14 is to reconstruct the oversight machinery that the Bombay and Madras High Courts found constitutionally suspect, in a form designed to evade the interim orders," IFF said.

Several notices

The government has been increasingly issuing broad takedown orders in the past few weeks against posts and accounts that are anti-establishment, and ones that mocked Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Asked about the recent spurt in takedowns, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that the Centre was targeting "AI-generated deepfakes" and "fake news".

Earliest Census data set to be available in 2027; India has fewer villages than during Census 2011

Vijaita Singh

NEW DELHI

As Census 2027 is being conducted digitally, most of the data gathered during the process will be published in 2027, Mritunjay Kumar Narayan, Registrar-General and Census Commissioner of India, said on Monday.

He said the caste enumeration methodology for the second phase was yet to be finalised, and officials were studying multiple suggestions received on the subject.

Data shared by Census officials show that compared with Census 2011, there has been a decrease in the number of villages by over 1,000 and an increase in urban settlements – statutory towns and Census towns.

From Census 2011, the number of States and Union Territories increased



Mritunjay Kumar Narayan, and Biswajit Das (Left) addressing the media on Census 2027 in New Delhi on Monday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

by one to 36; districts from 640 to 784, an increase of 144; sub-districts by 1,102 – from 5,990 to 7,092; statutory towns by 1,087 – from 4,041 to 5,128; and census towns by 688 – from 3,892 to 4,580. The number of villages declined by 1,030, from 6,40,932 in 2011 to 6,39,902, according to the administrative unit data presented by the

Commissioner.

Mr. Narayan said West Bengal was the only State that had not notified the Census process, and while deliberations were on with the State government, it had time till September 30 to carry out the exercise.

This would be the first digital Census, first to enumerate caste and first to allow a self-enumeration option to respondents. The

data keyed in during self-enumeration would be verified by enumerators during door-to-door visit and the option was only available for residents living in India, he said, allaying concerns of data manipulation.

“As per the Census Act 1948, the Census data are confidential and the respondents are to answer to the best of their knowledge. Only aggregate data is released, an individual’s data cannot be shared with States or even the judiciary and do not also come under the purview of the Right to Information Act (RTI). Census data cannot be used to provide reservation benefits to any individual,” Mr. Narayan said, while addressing a press conference before the first phase of Census kicks off on April 1 in certain States. He said Census data were beyond the “scope of

investigation.”

16 languages

Mr. Narayan said the self-enumeration portal, available in 16 languages, would be live from April 1 to 15 for residents of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Goa, Karnataka, Sikkim, Odisha, Lakshadweep, Mizoram and the NDMC and Delhi Cantonment areas. Self-enumeration option would be available 15 days before the first phase of Census – the House Listing Operations (HLO) begins. The window for the first phase is April 1-September 30 for all States. The second phase – population enumeration where each individual’s information in the household, such as religion, caste etc. would be asked, would be conducted in February 2027.

“People can use mobile phones and laptop to fill in the data,” he said.

Spain denies U.S. permission to use its airspace for 'illegal' war on Iran

The country has already barred U.S. from using jointly operated military bases; Defence Minister calls the war 'profoundly illegal and unjust'; the Pedro Sanchez govt. has been Europe's loudest opposing voice against U.S. and Israeli attacks on Iran

Associated Press

MADRID

Spain has closed its airspace to U.S. planes involved in the Iran war, the country's Defence Minister said on Monday, marking another step in the government's opposition to U.S. and Israeli involvement in the conflict in West Asia.

The country had already said that the U.S. could not use jointly-operated military bases in the Iran conflict, which Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has described as illegal, reckless and unjust.

Minister Margarita Robles said on Monday that the same logic applied to the use of Spanish airspace



Protesters hold banners caricaturing U.S. President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Madrid. REUTERS

in the conflict. "This was made perfectly clear to the American military and forces from the very beginning. Therefore, neither the bases are authorised, nor, of course, is the use of Spanish airspace authorised for any actions related

to the war in Iran," Ms. Robles said.

Spain's government under Mr. Sanchez, one of Europe's most prominent left-wing leaders, has been Europe's loudest opposing voice against U.S. and Israeli military actions in

West Asia. He has called on the U.S., Israel and Iran to end the war, saying earlier this month: "You cannot respond to one illegality with another, because that's how humanity's great disasters begin."

After Mr. Sanchez's government denied the U.S. use of the Rota and Moron military bases in southern Spain, U.S. President Donald Trump threatened to cut trade with Madrid.

It was the latest flare-up between Spain and the U.S., which made trade threats against the European nation last year, too, when Mr. Sanchez said that his government would not increase its defence spending in accordance with a ramp-up agreed to by oth-

er NATO members following pressure from Mr. Trump.

At the time, Mr. Sanchez's government said that Spain could meet its military commitments by spending 2.1% of gross domestic product on defence, instead of the 5% the rest of the 32-nation military alliance agreed upon.

Mr. Sanchez was also among the most vocal critics of Israel's actions in the war in Gaza, which invited criticism from Israel's government on several occasions.

"I think everyone knows Spain's position; it's very clear," Ms. Robles said, calling the war in Iran "profoundly illegal and profoundly unjust."

Myanmar junta chief steps down, eyes Presidential role

Agence France-Presse

NAYPYIDAW

Myanmar cleared the way on Monday for coup-leading General Min Aung Hlaing to become President and maintain his rule in civilian garb, with lawmakers nominating him as a Vice-Presidential candidate and the junta replacing him as military commander.

Gen. Min Aung Hlaing has ruled Myanmar since 2021 when he ordered a coup toppling the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi – detaining the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, dissolving her party and triggering civil war.

After five years of hardline rule, he oversaw heavily restricted elections that criminalised protest or criticism of the vote and returned a walkover win for pro-military parties in



Key transfer: Myanmar's military chief Gen. Min Aung Hlaing (left) and his successor Gen. Ye Win Oo during a handover ceremony. AFP

poll results announced in late January.

Lower house MP Kyaw Kyaw Htay nominated Gen. Min Aung Hlaing for Vice-President on Monday, according to a television broadcast of a Parliamentary session on state-run media.

Three Vice-Presidents will be chosen, one of whom will be elected as President in a Parliament-wide vote.

The junta also installed a new military commander-in-chief, with former spymaster Gen. Ye Win Oo replacing Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, according to a junta statement.

“Today the current responsibilities of the commander-in-chief of the Tatmadaw have been transferred to General Ye Win Oo,” the statement said, referring to the Myanmar military.

Turkey says NATO defences down 4th Iran missile entering airspace

Egypt warns oil prices could cross \$200 a barrel

Reuters

Ankara, Tel Aviv, March 30

A BALLISTIC missile launched from Iran entered Turkish airspace before being shot down by NATO air and missile defences deployed in the eastern Mediterranean, Turkey's defence ministry said on Monday.

The incident marked the fourth such incident since the start of the Iran war, following three earlier interceptions by NATO systems earlier this month that prompted Ankara to protest and warn Tehran.

The ministry said all necessary measures were being taken "decisively and without hesitation" against any threat directed at Turkey's territory and airspace. In Cairo on Monday, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi urged US President Donald Trump to stop the Iran war, saying only he could do so, and warned that fears of the oil price going above \$200 a barrel were not exaggerated.

"I tell President Trump: nobody can stop the war in our region in the Gulf but you," Sisi said at the Egypt Energy Show 2026 conference in Cairo.



A portrait of Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is seen, as smoke rises after an Israeli airstrike in Dahiyyeh, Lebanon, on Monday. AP

"Please, Mr President, please. Please help us stop the war. You are capable of doing so," he added. "I fear that targeting energy facilities, whether production or refineries, will have very serious repercussions for the global economy and fuel prices," he said.

Market watchers had warned "the price of a barrel of oil could reach more than \$200,

and this is not an exaggeration," he added. The UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) said two of its members were killed in southern Lebanon on Monday after an explosion of "unknown origin" destroyed their vehicle.

It said a third peacekeeper was severely wounded and another was also injured in the incident which took place near

the Bani Haiyyan municipality.

The incident is the second in 24 hours after a UNIFIL peacekeeper was killed when a projectile exploded at one of its positions in a southern Lebanese village.

Meanwhile, Iran described US proposals to end a month of war in West Asia as "unrealistic, illogical and excessive" on Monday and unleashed more

missiles on Israel, as oil prices rose further after Yemen's Houthis entered the conflict.

Israel's military said two drones from Yemen had also been intercepted on Monday, two days after the Iran-aligned Houthis fired missiles at Israel for the first time since the start of the war. Lebanon's Hezbollah also fired rockets at Israel on Monday.

Trump threatens Iran's oil, power sites over deal

U.S. President claims to have made 'great progress' with 'more reasonable regime' in Iran; Tehran says it is not engaged in direct talks, terms proposals received through intermediaries 'irrational'

Stanly Johnny

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Monday that his administration was engaging in talks with Iran and threatened to strike its oil, power and water infrastructure if Tehran did not quickly agree to a deal and reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran denied holding direct talks, saying it had received a proposal through intermediaries that contained "very excessive, unrealistic and irrational" demands.

"The United States of America is in serious discussions with a new and more reasonable regime to end our Military Operations in Iran," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post. "Great progress has



Collateral damage: Fire breaks out at an Israeli oil refinery after being hit by debris from an intercepted Iranian missile. REUTERS

been made but, if for any reason a deal is not shortly reached, which it probably will be, and if the Hormuz Strait is not immediately "Open for Business," we will conclude our lovely "stay" in Iran by blowing up and completely obliter-

ating all of their Electric[ity] Generating Plants, Oil Wells and Kharg Island (and possibly all desalination plants!)."

48-hour deadline

On March 10, Mr. Trump had threatened to hit Iran

"20 times harder" if it did not open the Strait of Hormuz. On March 21, he gave a 48-hour deadline to Iran to reopen the strait, threatening to destroy Iran's power plants if it did not do so. On March 23, Mr. Trump backed off, delaying his deadline by five days, which was extended to April 6.

Iran and Israel continued to exchange fire on Monday. While the Israel Defence Forces claimed to have struck weapons production sites in Iran, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said they fired another wave of attacks targeting Israel and American bases in the region.

CONTINUED ON

» PAGE 10

EDITORIAL

» PAGE 6

Trump threatens Iran's power sites over deal

The U.S. President said his administration is in talks with Iran to end the war, while the Pentagon is sending additional troops to the region. Iran has denied reports of negotiations and said it has got a proposal from Washington which is not acceptable. It has made its own counter-proposal.

“It is not clear how much, even inside the U.S., the country's claims about diplomacy and negotiations are seriously taken into account,” Esmail Baghaei, spokesperson of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said about Mr. Trump's claims about talks. “Reactions and reflections also show that the extent of global trust in the U.S. claims in the field of diplomacy is very limited.”

‘Tehran will determine the end’

Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters dismissed Mr. Trump's threats and said Tehran “is the party that will determine the end” of the ongoing war. “Even though Trump, egoistically and mistakenly, initiated a military aggression against Iran along with the child-killing Zionist regime, he well knows that he will eventually be faced with the heroic and seasoned Iranian nation and its armed forces. This is why he has resorted to other world leaders to end the war,” military spokesman Ebrahim Zolfaqari said.

Iran and Israel continued to exchange fire on Monday, with the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) claiming to have struck weapons production sites in Iran.

The targets included a site where long-range anti-aircraft missiles are assembled, a manufacturing facility for components for anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, and a production and R&D site for ballistic missile engines, the IDF said. Israeli authorities said Iran carried out at least six missile attacks. An oil refinery in Haifa came under attack, causing a large blaze.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said they fired the 87th wave of attacks on Monday, targeting Israel and American bases in the region. According to an IRGC statement, the strikes targeted five U.S. bases in the region, as well as military positions in the southern, central and northern parts of Israel, including Haifa Bay, Kiryat Shmona, Tel Aviv, Be'er Sheva, Dimona, al-Kharj, Jufair and other locations.

Rupee doing fine, FM tells LS as currency crosses 95 a dollar

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Even as the rupee closed at ₹94.8 a dollar on Monday after depreciating to an all time low of over ₹95 earlier in the day, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that the rupee was “going fine” against the U.S. dollar compared with other emerging market currencies.

The rupee depreciated by more than ₹3 since March 2, 2026, when the pair was trading over ₹91. The Indian currency has depreciated by 4.1% since the commencement of the West Asia conflict on February 28, 2026, crossing ₹95 for the first time on Monday.

With oil prices remaining sticky at over \$104 a barrel and foreign institutional investors (FIIs) continuing to sell Indian stocks causing dollar outflow on Monday, the rupee’s value plunged to an all time low.

The Reserve Bank of India capped net open positions that banks can hold in the onshore currency market at \$100 million for banks at the end of the day.

The limit was up to 25% of the bank’s capital and was intended to arrest speculation in the market. While the central bank’s move did yield some results with the rupee opening at ₹93 on Monday, weak equity markets leading to FII exit and still high oil prices led to further depreciation. The issue of rupee depreciation was also raised by Opposition members in the Lok Sabha but Ms. Sitharaman asserted that India’s economic fundamentals remain strong.

The Indian currency has depreciated by 4.1% since the commencement of the West Asia conflict

“India’s economy is strong, our fiscal situation is strong, and the entire world is praising our fiscal deficit management. Our forex reserves are solid,” the Finance Minister said, adding, “Compared to other emerging economies, the rupee is doing fine (*theek chal raha hain*)..absolutely going fine”.

Ms. Sitharaman intervened after Samajwadi Party member Dharmendra Yadav referred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s earlier statement, made as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, in which Mr. Modi had claimed falling value of rupee eroded the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s reputation.

“Now, I want to ask whether the Prime Minister’s reputation has been affected or not,” Mr. Yadav asked. The Finance Minister then responded by saying that Mr. Modi emerged on top at a recent survey of world leaders.

She said the BJP was worried about rupee’s falling value as India was considered one of the “fragile five” economies under the UPA. She also targeted the Opposition for trying to pull down the country.

In a written reply, Ms. Sitharaman said the depreciation was not specific to the Indian currency, noting that several major Asian currencies had also weakened against the dollar during the period.