

India faces challenge in meeting 2030 maternal mortality goals, shows study

Anuradha Mascarenhas
Pune, March 31

A RECENT study in The Lancet Obstetrics, Gynaecology, and Women's Health journal shows the challenge before India in meeting the Sustainable Development Goal of bringing down the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) to below 70 deaths per 1 lakh live births by 2030.

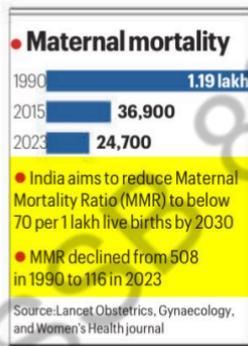
While the country has successfully brought down maternal mortality numbers from 1.19 lakh in 1990 to 36,900 in 2015 and 24,700 in 2023, the progress has slowed. As per the study, 'Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries and Risk Factors', while the MMR in India stood at 508 in 1990, it was down to 116 deaths per lakh live births in 2023.

India accounted for one-tenth of all maternal mortality numbers in 2023, the study says, putting the total deaths globally at 2.4 lakh. The study also shows that 100 of the 204 countries and territories covered had reached

the 2030 SDG target of below-70 MMR by 2023. Of the 104 not yet meeting the target, 15 had MMR in the range of 70 to 100, 16 between 100 and 140 (including India), and 73 MMR greater than 140. Apart from India, the countries struggling to meet the SDG 2030 target include the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Pakistan.

Given the low starting point, India, however, remains among countries to have seen the most substantial improvement in MMR since 1990, along with Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Morocco, Nepal and Rwanda.

Maternal mortality is defined as deaths due to obstetric complications or comorbid disorders exacerbated by pregnancy, up to 1 year after the end of the pregnancy, irrespective of the method by which pregnancy ended. Dr Anjali Radkar, a demographer and former Professor and Head, Centre for the Study of Social Inclusion, Gokhale Institute of Politics



and Economics, says that within India, while the South and some states are on course to achieving the SDG target by 2030, the overall MMR is being pulled down by states such as Assam and Uttar Pradesh.

As per the Sample Registration System (SRS), which is the major source of fertility and mortality rates in India, while India's MMR declined from 122 per one lakh live births in 2015-17 to 88 in

2021-2023, MMR in Assam came down from 215 to 110 in the same period, and in UP, from 197 to 141, Radkar pointed out.

The demographer advised targeted action, including by strengthening primary health-care systems, with a focus on maternal and child health. "When child mortality declines, fertility rates tend to decrease as well. Lower fertility in turn, contributes to a reduction in maternal mortality... This integrated approach can play a key role in reducing MMR," she said, adding that unless maternal mortality was reduced, the global SDG goals for maternal health would also remain out of reach. At the same time, experts at the International Institute for Population Sciences pointed to the possibly flawed presentation in the study, grouping smaller countries with India.

"Because India has a much larger number of births, comparing absolute maternal death numbers with countries like

the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Nigeria is not appropriate," Dr Nandita Saikia, a professor at the institute, said.

Pointing out that MMR was 565 for Congo compared to 116 for India, Saikia said: "Remember that India had about 23.22 million births in 2023 against 4.37 million in Congo... In India's case, wide demographic diversity further adds to the complexity and may affect the accuracy of such comparison." Saikia also pointed to different numbers for maternal mortality calculated for India by the United Nations Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-Agency Group and the SRS for 2023, at 80 and 88, respectively.

As per the Lancet study, haemorrhage and hypertensive disorders — easily preventable — accounted for nearly half (above 40%) of the maternal deaths in 2023. Setbacks to general healthcare during Covid are believed to have played a role in the slide seen in 2020-21.

Chanchal Kumar appointed as I&B Secy, Vir Vikram Yadav to take charge as DGCA chief

Harikishan Sharma

New Delhi, March 31

IN A major bureaucratic reshuffle, the Centre appointed Chanchal Kumar, a 1992-batch Bihar cadre IAS officer, as the new Information and Broadcasting Secretary. The incumbent, Sanjay Jaju, was shifted as Secretary at the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, according to an order issued by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) on Tuesday.

Currently, Kumar is posted as the Secretary, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region. This development comes as the Government has constituted seven empowered groups of secretaries to prepare a response to deal with emerging situations and the impact of the ongoing West Asia conflict.

Several IAS officers from the 1995 batch who were em-

panelled as secretaries last month, have now been posted across several ministries. Among them is Rohit Kansal, a 1995 AGMUT (Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram, and Union Territories)-cadre officer who has been appointed the rural development secretary following the superannuation of the incumbent, Shailesh Kumar Singh, on Tuesday.

Bhuvnesh Kumar, a 1995-batch IAS officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre, has been appointed as the new Tourism Secretary, replacing Srivatsa Krishna (1994 batch, Karnataka Cadre), who has been appointed as Minority Affairs Secretary. Minority Affairs Secretary Chandra Sekhar Kumar, a 1992-batch IAS officer of the Odisha cadre, has been appointed as Chief Executive Officer, National Rainfed Area Authority, which operates under the Ministry of Agricul-

Many IAS officers from 1995 batch who were empanelled as secretaries last month, have now been posted across several ministries

ture & Farmers Welfare, in the rank and pay of Secretary to the Government of India.

Bharat Harbasnlal Khera, a 1995-batch IAS officer of the Himachal Pradesh cadre, currently serving as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, has been appointed as Officer on Special Duty, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. Khera will take over as Secretary, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, in place of Subhas Chandra Lal Das, who will be superannuating on April 30. Nivedita Shukla

Verma, a 1991-batch IAS officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre, who was working as Secretary, Department of Chemicals and Petro-Chemicals, has been appointed as Secretary, Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances. Tejveer Singh, a 1994-batch IAS officer of the Punjab cadre, currently posted in his cadre, will succeed Verma as Secretary, Department of Chemicals and Petro-Chemicals.

In a separate order, the Government also shifted Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, a 1996-batch IAS officer of the Madhya Pradesh cadre who is presently posted as the Director-General, Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). Vir Vikram Yadav, a 1996-batch IAS officer of the Odisha cadre, will be the new DGCA director-general. Kidwai has been appointed as Additional Secretary, Department of Personnel & Training.

Lavrov to visit Delhi mid May for BRICS meet

Shubhajit Roy

New Delhi, March 31

RUSSIAN FOREIGN Minister Sergey Lavrov is planning to visit New Delhi on May 14 and 15 to participate in the meeting of foreign ministers of the BRICS countries, the visiting Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko told TASS news agency.

According to TASS, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister said, "Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov plans to take part in the BRICS ministerial meeting on May 14-15 this year, which will determine the... general outlines of the final documents that the Indian presidency will submit to the BRICS summit."

On the sidelines of BRICS events, a separate working visit by Lavrov will take place to meet External Affairs Minister Jaishankar and other Indian officials.

Rudenko said, "In connection with the BRICS events, it is also planned to hold a separate working visit by Lavrov to India to meet with Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and other Indian officials."

India holds the BRICS presidency in 2026, and consensus on the issue of the war in West Asia has been elusive.

As India is looking at increasing LNG and LPG supplies from Russia, Jaishankar and Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Rudenko on Monday. This comes at a time when Delhi is facing a shortage of energy in the wake of the war in West Asia – which has completed 30 days now.

After the meeting, Jaishankar had said that they spoke



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov

E. EXPLAINED

Energy security high on agenda

RUSSIAN OIL imports have significantly cushioned India's war-hit energy supplies, even as much of the world reels under a stocks shock. Lavrov's visit might pave the way for even greater cooperation on energy, as well as firm up a united BRICS response to the war.

about further advancement of wide-ranging cooperation, as well as regional and global developments.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal had said that both sides reviewed the full spectrum of Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership and shared perspectives on bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest.

According to TASS, on March 27, Russia and India had expressed readiness to increase LNG supplies. Delivery of LPG to India is also being discussed, a source in the oil and gas industry told TASS.

RBI extends export realisation timeline amid persistent global disruptions, supply chain risks

Hitesh Vyas

Mumbai, March 31

IN A response to the persistent geopolitical uncertainties and supply chain disruptions in West Asia, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Tuesday announced the continuation and expansion of key relief measures aimed at supporting exporters struggling to meet payment realisation deadlines.

The central bank said it has been receiving multiple representations from stakeholders highlighting difficulties in adhering to prescribed timelines for the realisation of export proceeds. These challenges are largely attributed to the ongoing logistical bottlenecks and uncertainties arising from the West Asia crisis.

In a November 2025 directive, the RBI had extended the time period for realisation and repatriation of the full export value of goods, software, and services exported from India.

The permissible period was increased from nine to 15 months from the export date.

Clarifying its stance, the central bank on Tuesday said these relaxations will remain in force, and exporters may avail the facility as per the stipulated conditions.

E. EXPLAINED

What prompted the relief measures

Multiple representations that highlighted the difficulties in meeting prescribed timelines to realise export proceeds were sent to the Reserve Bank by stakeholders. The key reasons behind it were logistical bottlenecks and uncertainties arising due to the West Asia war

As part of the supportive measures, the RBI had earlier enhanced the maximum period for realisation of both pre-shipment and post-shipment export credit to 450 days for disbursements made up to March 31, 2026.

In light of the continuing disruptions, the central bank has decided to extend it further.

The enhanced export credit period of 450 days will now apply to all disbursements made until June 30, 2026.

The central bank said it will continue to monitor the evolving global conditions and stands ready to intervene in the

most appropriate manner, reaffirming its commitment to safeguarding the interests of India's export sector in uncertain times.

India's exports to the West Asia have been impacted by the ongoing conflict, resulting in substantial trade flow disruptions. Key shipping routes, particularly through the Strait of Hormuz, have become increasingly hazardous.

It has led to delays, elevated freight costs, higher insurance premiums, and in some cases, the suspension or diversion of shipments — further extending transit times and increasing overall expenses.

The country's total exports (merchandise and services combined) for February 2026 are estimated at \$76.13 billion, registering a positive growth of 11.05% vis-à-vis February 2025.

The falling value of the rupee, rise in oil prices and fears over inflation in the wake of the West Asia conflict led the RBI to take action.

The central bank has instructed banks to limit their net open exposure to the currency in the foreign exchange market to \$100 million by the end of each day. Authorized dealers must comply with this rule by April 10.

'March India diesel export to SE Asia at 7-year high on war'

Reuters

SINGAPORE

India's diesel exports to Southeast Asia surged to the highest in more than seven years in March, shipping data showed, as traders pivoted supply to cover short positions and refiners cashed in on higher profits in Asia caused by the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran.

The surge in exports could boost spot sale mar-

gins for Indian refiners who have purchased large volumes of prompt Russian crude to replace Middle East supply disrupted by the war.

About 1 million metric tonne (7.45 million barrels) of diesel have been shipped on this trade route, according to data from analytics firm Kpler and three trade sources, with around half of the volumes bound for Singapore.

Around 90% of these

volumes were shipped by Reliance Industries, Kpler data showed, operator of the world's largest refining complex.

Reliance did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Supply pivots

Traders tapped India's diesel supply for Southeast Asia and Australia after the Middle East conflict disrupted crude supplies to Asia, leading refineries to

cut output and countries including China to ban exports of refined products.

"Asian buyers that usually rely on Chinese and northeast Asia must seek alternative supply, with India's Reliance being one of the main candidates in the region," analysts from consultancy FGE Nexant ECA said.

India is known as a swing supplier in global oil markets as it can sell its refined products either to

Europe or Asia, whichever is more profitable.

These shipments will help to ease supply tightness going into April, traders said. Some analysts expect the trend to last in the near term despite the Indian government reinstating export taxes for diesel.

Sparta Commodities' analyst James Noel-Beswick said its arbitrage calculations suggested that the trade flow can continue into August at least.

Sanand 'bridge' to Silicon Valley: PM on rise in semiconductor ecosystem

Abhinay Deshpande

AHMEDABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday positioned Gujarat's Sanand as an emerging link in the global semiconductor network as he inaugurated a semiconductor assembly and test facility of Kaynes Semicon in Sanand, declaring that a "bridge" now connects the industrial town with Silicon Valley.

Addressing the gathering, the Prime Minister described the current period as the "decade of India" and underscored the rapid expansion of the country's electronics sector. He projected that India's semiconductor market could exceed \$100 billion by the end of the decade.

The plant, built at an estimated cost of ₹3,300 crore, will serve as a signifi-



Switching on: Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the inauguration of the Kaynes Semiconductor Plant in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. ANI

cant milestone under India's semiconductor mission.

Global market

Stating that India is emerging as a reliable semiconductor supplier in the global market, Mr. Modi added that chips manufactured in Sanand will reach the United States and il-

luminare the world. "India's current global semiconductor market stands at ₹4.5 lakh crore, with a target of reaching ₹9 lakh crore by 2030," he said.

"As a result, the Semiconductor Mission was launched in India in 2021. This is not merely an industrial policy, but a declaration of India's confidence

on the global stage. He added that today's New India is not just witnessing change but is moving forward to lead it," he said.

India's position

Referring to India's recent participation in the Pax Silica initiative, a U.S.-led coalition focused on securing supply chains for semiconductors, artificial intelligence and rare earth elements, Mr. Modi said such collaborations will enhance resilience in critical technology sectors.

'Techade'

Describing the current period as India's 'Techade', Mr. Modi noted that India is among the leading adopters of artificial intelligence and pointed to the success of Digital India and fintech as evidence of growing public trust in technology.



Lights, Camera, Lift-off

THE NASA Artemis II SLS (Space Launch System) rocket with the Orion spacecraft is seen at Launch Complex 39B at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, on Tuesday. AP

NASA begins Artemis II countdown

Associated Press

Cape Canaveral, March 31

NASA BEGAN the countdown Monday for humanity's first launch to the moon in 53 years. The 32-story Space Launch System rocket is poised to blast off Wednesday evening with four astronauts. After a day in orbit around Earth, their Orion capsule will propel them to the moon and back.

There are no stops — just a quick U-turn around the moon.

The nearly 10-day flight will end with a splashdown in the Pacific. "Our team has worked extremely hard to get us to this moment," said launch director Charlie Blackwell-Thompson.

"Certainly all indications are right now we are in excellent, excellent shape."

NASA's Artemis II mission should have soared in February, but was grounded by hydrogen fuel leaks. The leaks were fixed, but then a helium pressurization line became

clogged, forcing a return to the hangar late last month.

Unlike Apollo, which sent only men to the moon from 1968 through 1972, Artemis' debut crew includes a woman, person of color and a non-US citizen.

Artemis II's pilot Victor Glover said that he wants young people to see them and think, "Girl power and that's awesome, and that young brown boys and girls can look at me and go 'Hey, he looks like me and he's doing what???"

● SPACE

How NASA will fly astronauts to the Moon and back for Artemis II

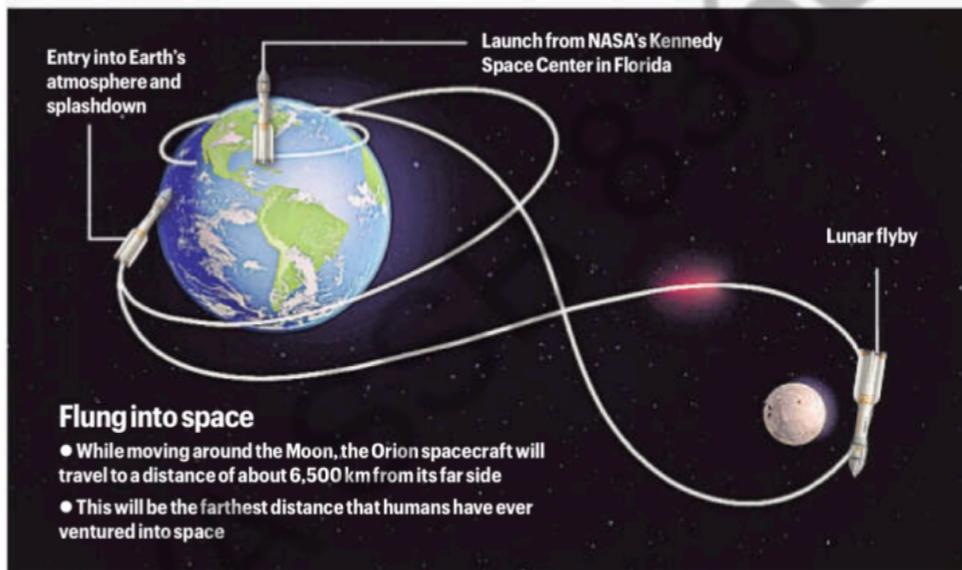
Amitabh Sinha
New Delhi, March 31

NASA's ARTEMIS II mission, carrying four astronauts on a flyby mission to the Moon, is all set to be launched on Wednesday. This will be the first time humans will get to the Moon's neighbourhood after the last Apollo mission in 1972. The Artemis II mission will not land on the Moon but circle it and return to Earth after a 10-day journey. A successor mission, planned for 2028, is scheduled to make a Moon landing with another set of four astronauts.

Longer vs shorter routes

The Artemis II mission will take three to four days to reach the Moon's neighbourhood — roughly the same time the Apollo missions took to land on the lunar surface. Many other recent uncrewed lunar missions, including India's Chandrayaan-3, took much longer, between a few weeks and a few months, to get to the Moon.

Longer routes are more fuel-efficient and economical, while quicker routes require more powerful rockets. The SLS (Space Launch System) rockets being used for the Artemis missions are the most



powerful launch vehicles available to NASA right now. The Apollo missions used Saturn V rockets, which are the most powerful rockets ever built.

Both the SLS rocket and the Orion spacecraft being used for this mission are relatively new. The two had debuted on the Artemis I mission in 2022, which was un-

crewed but followed roughly the same path to the Moon and back, though it stayed in space for a longer duration, about 25 days, to carry out tests. This is the first time that the SLS rocket and Orion spacecraft are being used to carry astronauts.

The path

The Artemis II Mission will make two rounds of the Earth before embarking on its journey towards the Moon. Once there, it will go around the Moon before starting the return journey to Earth. While moving around the Moon, the Orion spacecraft will travel to a distance of about 6,500 km from the far side of the Moon. This will be the farthest that humans have ever ventured into space.

The Apollo missions that landed on the Moon reached an altitude of just about 110 km from the far side of the lunar surface, while moving around it.

Artemis II is sort of a test-ride mission, meant to test and validate all systems before astronauts finally make the landing on the Moon in 2028.

The mission's launch was aborted earlier. As of Monday, NASA said there was an 80% chance that the weather would be favourable for a smooth launch on April 1.

Trump blasts allies, tells them 'go get your own oil'

U.S. President accuses NATO partners of not being there for America during the war on Iran; he tells countries they can either buy fuel from the U.S. or go to the Strait of Hormuz to pick it up

Sriram Lakshman

LONDON

U.S. President Donald Trump lashed out at allies on Tuesday telling them to fend for themselves regarding oil supplies, adding to the pressure within the Western military alliance, NATO, whose members have not joined the U.S. and Israel in their war on Iran.

Mr. Trump accused allies of not being there for the U.S. and encouraged countries to take the oil from the Strait of Hormuz, the crucial waterway bordering Iran that Tehran has mostly blocked off. The President's messages came as oil prices have been surging and hours after the UAE's authorities reported a drone attack on an oil tanker off Dubai.

"All of those countries that can't get jet fuel because of the Strait of Hormuz, like the United Kingdom, which refused to get involved in the decapitation of Iran, I have a suggestion for you: Number 1, buy from the U.S., we have plenty, and Number 2, build up some delayed courage, go to the Strait, and just TAKE IT," Mr.



Assessing damage: Members of the Red Crescent Society working at the site of an attack in Tehran on Tuesday. REUTERS

Trump wrote on the Truth Social site, early Tuesday morning Washington time.

"You'll have to start learning how to fight for yourself, the U.S.A. won't be there to help you anymore, just like you weren't there for us. Iran has been, essentially, decimated. The hard part is done. Go get your own oil!" Mr. Trump added.

In recent weeks, the President has been at odds with the position of U.K. Prime Minister on Iran and the fallout of the war, after spending the larger part of last year embracing Mr. Starmer and the U.K.-U.S. "special relationship"

since his return to the White House.

However, Mr. Trump, in a subsequent post, said he "greatly respected" Britain's King Charles III and looked forward to welcoming the King and Queen on a state visit to Washington at the end of the month. Buckingham Palace confirmed the visit.

The U.K. government has used the British Royal Family as a diplomatic tool with Mr. Trump, including by hosting him for a second state visit in the U.K. last year.

Asked for a reaction to Mr. Trump's statements, Downing Street directed

'Iran has will to end war, but needs guarantees'

TEHRAN

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Tuesday his country had the "necessary will" to end the ongoing war with Israel and the United States, but was seeking guarantees that the conflict would not be repeated. "The solution to normalising the situation is the cessation of their aggressive attacks," he said on Tuesday. » PAGE 14

The Hindu to Mr. Starmer's words on a visit to Finland last week. There, the Prime Minister had focused on Russia's war with Ukraine saying there was a "war on two fronts", in Ukraine and Iran. Russian President Vladimir Putin was benefiting from the war in West Asia, Mr. Starmer had said, as he urged the harder pursuit of Russia's 'shadow fleet' of oil-carrying vessels in European waters, circumventing Western sanctions.

CONTINUED ON

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CAULDRON OF CONFLICT

» PAGE 6

Trump blasts allies, tells them 'get your own oil'

"This is not our war and we're not going to get drawn in to it," Mr. Starmer had said on Monday, in reference to Iran, reiterating that the U.K.'s involvement was restricted to defensive action.

U.K. Defence Secretary John Healey, on a visit to West Asia, said on Tuesday that extra British troops and air defence systems would be deployed to the region, according to a BBC report.

Several European countries have disagreed publicly with the U.S.'s actions to varying degrees, with none joining the U.S. and Israel in striking Iran.

Remarks on France

Mr. Trump also took aim at France in his Tuesday posts.

"The Country of France wouldn't let planes headed to Israel, loaded up with military supplies, fly over French territory. France has been VERY UNHELPFUL with respect to the 'Butcher of Iran' [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei] who has been successfully eliminated! The U.S.A. will REMEMBER!!!"

Mr. Trump wrote on Truth Social. *The Hindu* has reached out to the French foreign ministry for a response.

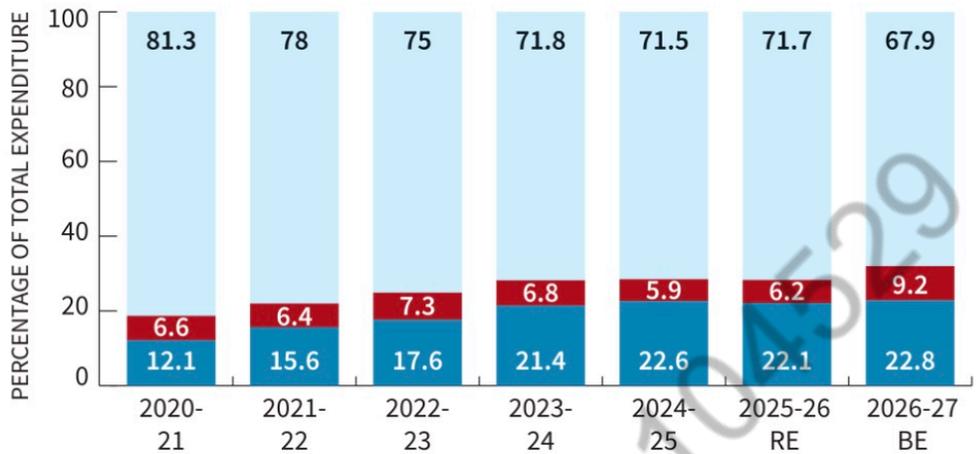
On Monday, Mr. Trump had threatened to destroy oil wells, power plants, Iran's Kharg Island (an oil hub) and desalination plants, if Iran did not reach a deal with the U.S. and open up the Strait of Hormuz.

U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth reiterated Mr. Trump's message during a press briefing at the Pentagon on Tuesday. He said the world should "be prepared to stand up" and that it was not just America's "problem set" going forward, claiming that the U.S. had done the "lion's share" of opening up the Strait.

Fiscal trends

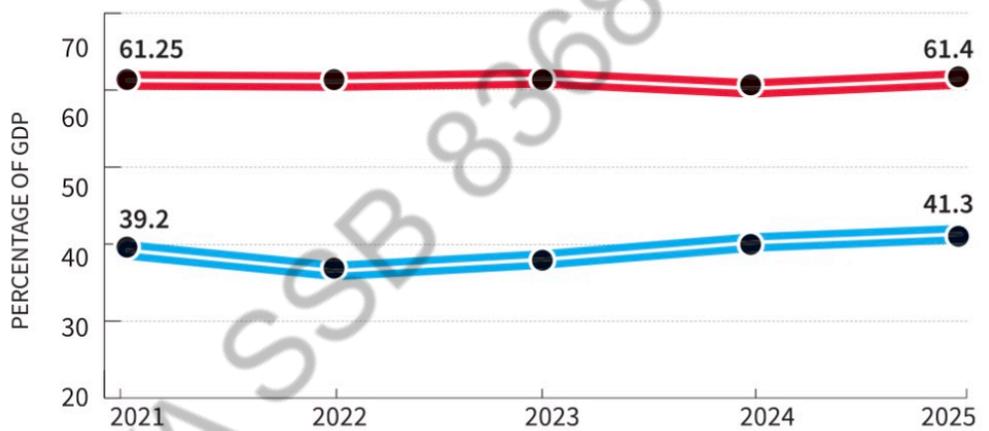
India's fiscal stability is tied to capital spending and transaction-based revenues, leaving it vulnerable to energy shocks amid geopolitical tensions

- Capital Expenditure
- Grant in Aid Capex
- Revenue Expenditure



SOURCE: BUDGET AT A GLANCE 2026-27

- PFCE (%)
- Household Liabilities (as of March 2025) (%)



SOURCE: CMIE
SOURCE: STOCK OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND LIABILITIES OF HOUSEHOLDS, RBI HOUSEHOLD SAVINGS



Iran has 'necessary will' to end war, but seeking guarantees: President

Iran's five-point counterproposal to 15-point U.S. plan calls for ending the 'aggression'; attack on Isfahan, which hosts nuclear enrichment site, created a massive fireball; strike on oil tanker caused a fire, which officials say 'did not result in an oil spill'

**Agence France-Presse
Associated Press**

TEHRAN/DUBAI

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Tuesday his country had the "necessary will" to end the ongoing war with Israel and the United States, but was seeking guarantees that the conflict would not be repeated.

"We possess the necessary will to end this conflict, provided that essential conditions are met – especially the guarantees required to prevent repetition of the aggression," Mr.



Caught in crosshairs: Damage to the Kuwait-flagged *Al-Salmi* oil tanker, following a reported Iranian strike on Tuesday. REUTERS

Pezeshkian said in a phone conversation with the President of the European Council, according to a

statement from his office, reiterating a key demand of Tehran's.

Responding to a 15-point

U.S. plan for ending the war last week, Iran issued a five-point counterproposal that also called for ending the "aggression" and establishing a mechanism guaranteeing that neither Israel nor the United States would return to war, Iranian media reported.

"The solution to normalising the situation is the cessation of their aggressive attacks," Mr. Pezeshkian said on Tuesday.

U.S. strikes hit a city on Tuesday that is home to one of Iran's main nuclear sites, sending a massive fireball into the sky, and

Tehran attacked a fully loaded Kuwaiti oil tanker in the Persian Gulf.

An Iranian drone hit a Kuwaiti oil tanker in waters off the United Arab Emirates city of Dubai, sparking a blaze that was later put out, the Dubai Media Office said. Authorities said there was no oil spill.

U.S.-Israeli strikes also killed four persons, wounded 26 and damaged the Grand Husseiniya, a Shia Muslim mosque in northwest Iranian city of Zanzan. Local media added that "parts of dome and minarets were damaged".

'We have no kings,' chant protesters as anti-Trump movement expands

Anisha Dutta
NEW YORK

A slogan touted as a warning against rising authoritarianism under U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has, over the past year, grown into one of the largest protest movements in recent American history with millions across the country and in cities abroad, taking to the streets on March 28 under the banner: "No Kings."

"IN AMERICA, WE HAVE NO KINGS," declares the website of the 'No Kings' movement, a loose but rapidly expanding coalition opposing President Donald Trump, in a message that has now become a rallying cry. It goes on to accuse the administration of unleashing "masked secret police", pursuing "an illegal, catastrophic war putting us in danger and driving up our costs", and undermining civil liberties. "Power belongs to the people – not to wannabe kings or their billionaire cronies." White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson characterised them as the product of "leftist funding networks" with little real public support. The "only people who care about these Trump Derangement Therapy Sessions are the reporters who are paid to cover them," Ms. Jackson said in a statement.

According to the organisers, Saturday's demonstrations, the third nationwide mobilisation since Mr. Trump's re-election in January 2025, were the largest yet with an estimated eight million people participating in nearly every major U.S. city, alongside solidarity protests in Paris, London, Lisbon and Rome among other cities. The turnout surpassed earlier waves in June and October



Massive outrage: Demonstrators congregating at the State Capitol during a 'No Kings' protest in St. Paul, Minnesota. REUTERS

last year, which drew roughly five million and seven million participants, respectively, according to the organisers.

Grassroots movement

'No Kings' is a coalition-driven protest movement primarily driven by progressive, anti-authoritarian organisations, including Indivisible, 50501, Move-On, Public Citizen, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the National Action Network. The groups also bring in a broad range of partner organisations, labor unions, legal organisations such as the American Civil Liberties Union, and advocacy groups such as the Movement for Black Lives.

Their stated aim, according to organisers, is to "safeguard democracy from an authoritarian" through "organised, non-violent, insistent people power". That message appears to be resonating across a wide spectrum of Americans. While immigration enforcement has emerged as a central flashpoint, the protests reflect a convergence of grievances: the administration's military posture abroad, especially its war in Iran; rising living costs; alleged voter suppression; and the rollback of civil rights protections.

The symbolic centre of Saturday's protests was the Twin Cities region – Minneapolis and St. Paul – where tensions over immigration enforcement have been particularly acute after residents stood up to the surge of federal immigration agents the Trump administration sent into the region earlier this year and after the death of two residents, Renee Good and Alex Pretti, who were killed while observing activities by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The flagship rally drew tens of thousands to the State Capitol in St. Paul. Senator Bernie Sanders addressed the crowd alongside actor-activist Jane Fonda and musicians Joan Baez and Maggie Rogers. Later, Bruce Springsteen performed a song titled 'Streets of Minneapolis', sharply critical of immigration enforcement policies. A pre-recorded message from actor Robert De Niro was also played at the rally.

The actor said he wakes up "depressed" by the political climate but felt hopeful seeing millions mobilise. He also praised Minnesotans for "running ICE out of town" – a claim that organisers say reflects the growing resistance to federal enforcement efforts. Protesters held up ef-

figies of Mr. Trump, Vice President J.D. Vance and other officials in the administration, calling for their ousting and arrest.

In Washington, hundreds marched past the Lincoln Memorial and into the National Mall, holding signs that read "Put down the crown, clown" and "Regime change begins at home". Demonstrators rang bells, played drums and chanted "No kings."

In New York City, thousands packed Times Square and marched through Midtown Manhattan, forcing police to shut down major streets.

Demonstrators carried placards reading "No kings, no crowns" and "Democracy, not dynasty," while chanting slogans. The scale of turnout likely exceeded October's protest, when more than 100,000 people gathered across the city's five boroughs.

Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, said during a news conference that Mr. Trump and his supporters want people to be afraid to protest.

"They want us to be afraid that there's nothing we can do to stop them," she said. "But you know what? They are wrong – dead wrong."

Critics say the administration's actions have tested constitutional norms and intensified fears of executive overreach. The "No Kings" movement has positioned itself not merely as a protest campaign but also as a sustained resistance effort.

The organisers announced a "mass call" on March 31 with leaders and fellow local activists to celebrate the historic mobilisation and dig into what comes next.

(Anisha Dutta is a journalist based in New York)

China, Pak. outline 5-point plan to end West Asia war

Agence France-Presse

BEIJING

China and Pakistan called on Tuesday for an immediate end to the war in the West Asia, and for peace talks as soon as possible, as they agreed to boost their cooperation on Iran.

The two countries outlined a joint initiative “for restoring peace and stability in the Gulf and Middle East region”, after a visit from senior Pakistani officials to Beijing.

Both countries have sought to mediate in the West Asia to prevent the conflict from escalating, with Islamabad saying it is ready to host “meaningful talks” between the United States and Iran.



Wang Yi

Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar met his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi and agreed to “strengthen strategic communication and coordination on the Iran situation and ... make new efforts towards advocating for peace”, Beijing said.

Mr. Dar’s Ministry later said the two sides had

agreed on a five-point plan, starting with the “immediate cessation of hostilities” and the “start of peace talks as soon as possible”.

On talks, which the United States claims are ongoing but Iran denies, the governments said dialogue and diplomacy were “the only viable option to resolve conflicts”.

“China and Pakistan support the relevant parties in initiating talks, with all parties committing to peaceful resolution of disputes, and refraining from the use or the threat of use of force during peace talks,” it added.

The plan also calls for an end to attacks on civilians and non-military targets.



Russian-flagged oil tanker *Anatoly Kolodki* (right), approaches the Matanzas port in Cuba on Tuesday. AP

'Sanctioned' Russian tanker brings oil lifeline to blackout-hit Cuba

Reuters

Matanzas, March 31

THE RUSSIAN vessel *Anatoly Kolodkin* docked Tuesday at the Cuban port of Matanzas laden with 730,000 barrels of oil, marking the first time in three months that an oil tanker reached the island.

The administration of US President Donald Trump had allowed the shipment to proceed despite its ongoing energy blockade.

Cubans, including Energy and Mines Minister Vicente de la O Levy, cheered the ship's arrival. A shortage of petroleum has exacerbated a deep economic crisis that has left the population mired in long blackouts and facing a severe shortage of food and medicine.

"Our gratitude to the Government and People of Russia

for all the support we are receiving. A valuable shipment that arrives amidst the complex energy situation we are facing," de la O Levy wrote on X.

Cuba produces barely 40 per cent of its required fuel and relies on imports to sustain its energy grid. Experts say the anticipated shipment could produce about 180,000 barrels of diesel, enough to feed Cuba's daily demand for nine or 10 days.

"The arrival of an oil tanker to a country has likely never generated so much news as the Russian one to Cuba," wrote Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernandez de Cosio on X.

"It's a sign of the brutal siege Cubans endure with heroism and stoicism. It's a demonstration of the criminal cruelty of imperialism against a nation that refuses to be dominated."

Japan deploys first long-range missiles, boosts strike capability

Associated Press

Tokyo, March 31

JAPAN'S FIRST long-range missile was deployed at a southwestern army camp, officials said Tuesday, as the country pushes to bolster its offensive capabilities.

The upgraded Type-12 land-to-ship missiles, developed and produced by Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, became operational at Camp Kengun in Kumamoto prefecture.

"As Japan faces the most severe and complex security environment in the postwar era ... it is an extremely important capability to strengthen Japan's deterrence and responsiveness," Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said. "It demonstrates Japan's firm determination and capability to defend itself."

The upgraded Type-12 missile has a range of about 1,000 kilometers, a significant extension from the 200-kilometer range of the original that would allow it to reach mainland China.



The Type-12 land-to-ship missile launcher at Camp Kengun in the Kumamoto prefecture, Japan. FILE

RBI extends export realisation timeline amid persistent global disruptions, supply chain risks

Hitesh Vyas

Mumbai, March 31

IN A response to the persistent geopolitical uncertainties and supply chain disruptions in West Asia, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Tuesday announced the continuation and expansion of key relief measures aimed at supporting exporters struggling to meet payment realisation deadlines.

The central bank said it has been receiving multiple representations from stakeholders highlighting difficulties in adhering to prescribed timelines for the realisation of export proceeds. These challenges are largely attributed to the ongoing logistical bottlenecks and uncertainties arising from the West Asia crisis.

In a November 2025 directive, the RBI had extended the time period for realisation and repatriation of the full export value of goods, software, and services exported from India.

The permissible period was increased from nine to 15 months from the export date.

Clarifying its stance, the central bank on Tuesday said these relaxations will remain in force, and exporters may avail the facility as per the stipulated conditions.

E. EXPLAINED

What prompted the relief measures

Multiple representations that highlighted the difficulties in meeting prescribed timelines to realise export proceeds were sent to the Reserve Bank by stakeholders. The key reasons behind it were logistical bottlenecks and uncertainties arising due to the West Asia war

As part of the supportive measures, the RBI had earlier enhanced the maximum period for realisation of both pre-shipment and post-shipment export credit to 450 days for disbursements made up to March 31, 2026.

In light of the continuing disruptions, the central bank has decided to extend it further. The enhanced export credit period of 450 days will now apply to all disbursements made until June 30, 2026.

The central bank said it will continue to monitor the evolving global conditions and stands ready to intervene in the

most appropriate manner, reaffirming its commitment to safeguarding the interests of India's export sector in uncertain times.

India's exports to the West Asia have been impacted by the ongoing conflict, resulting in substantial trade flow disruptions. Key shipping routes, particularly through the Strait of Hormuz, have become increasingly hazardous.

It has led to delays, elevated freight costs, higher insurance premiums, and in some cases, the suspension or diversion of shipments — further extending transit times and increasing overall expenses.

The country's total exports (merchandise and services combined) for February 2026 are estimated at \$76.13 billion, registering a positive growth of 11.05% vis-à-vis February 2025.

The falling value of the rupee, rise in oil prices and fears over inflation in the wake of the West Asia conflict led the RBI to take action.

The central bank has instructed banks to limit their net open exposure to the currency in the foreign exchange market to \$100 million by the end of each day. Authorized dealers must comply with this rule by April 10.