

Kuki, Naga villagers clash during Manipur shutdown

One person injured after security personnel opened fire to prevent a mob from storming venue of CM's event; shutdown called by Meitei women's groups and social organisations enters third day

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

Clashes broke out between Kuki and Naga villagers in Kangpokpi district of Manipur on Tuesday during a shutdown called by the United Naga Council in protest against the killing of two highway passengers on April 18.

Officials said the clashes in Kangpokpi – a Kuki-majority district – had broken out hours after the three-day shutdown took effect on Tuesday. There were reports of stone-throwing and firing, allegedly by extremists.

Separately, a person sustained bullet injuries after security personnel opened fire to prevent a mob from storming the venue of Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh's programme in Thoubal district of the Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley.

Protesters demanding the arrest of those responsible for the killing of two minors in Bishnupur district a few days ago blocked a highway that the



Tensions prevail: Protesters gathered to block the vehicle of Manipur CM Yumnam Khemchand allow an oxygen supply van to pass during a shutdown in Thoubal on Tuesday. ANI

Chief Minister was scheduled to use to inaugurate a block development office at Wangjing Tentha in Thoubal district. He later travelled to the location and returned to Imphal, the State's capital, by helicopter.

The police said a large group of people, allegedly armed with stones and catapults, advanced towards the function venue during the Chief Minister's visit.

"Despite repeated warnings and appeals to disperse, the crowd continued to move aggressively, posing a serious threat. In

view of the escalating situation, the minimum necessary force was applied. As a last resort, controlled firing was undertaken in strict adherence to established protocols to disperse the mob and neutralise the threat," the police said in a statement.

The situation was later brought under control, but an individual, who was part of the mob, sustained an injury.

The Chief Minister resented the opposition to his visit. "I recently visited many hill districts, and there was no opposition. I

am surprised by the protest against my visit to Thoubal," he said, addressing a gathering at the event. He insisted that differences could be sorted out through dialogue. "All solutions come after talks between the parties involved," he said.

Meanwhile, a separate shutdown called by Meitei women's groups and social organisations kept much of the Imphal Valley tense for the third successive day. The shutdown from April 19, initially for five days, has now been extended to seven days.

13 killed in blast at fireworks unit set up for Thrissur Pooram



Fire field: Rescue personnel try to douse the fire following the blast at the fireworks unit near Thrissur, Kerala, on Tuesday. K.K. NAJEEB

The Hindu Bureau
THRISSUR

At least 13 people were killed and nearly 40 injured in a series of explosions at a fireworks manufacturing unit in Mundathikode, near Thrissur, in Kerala on Tuesday, in one of the worst such incidents reported in the region.

The fireworks manufac-

turing unit, situated on a five-acre paddy field, was preparing fireworks for the Thiruvambady Devaswom, one of the two groups organising the famous Thrissur Pooram. These materials included supplies for a sample fireworks show on Friday. The explosion occurred around 3.30 p.m.

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Congress moves privilege notice against PM over April 18 address

Unprecedented, unethical and blatant abuse of power: Notice

Asad Rehman
New Delhi, April 21



PM Modi addressed the nation on April 18, a day after the Constitution Amendment Bill was defeated in Lok Sabha. ANI

Venugopal said the PM used the word '*bhroon hatya*' (foeticide) to attack the opposition for blocking the passage of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill-2026, and two related Bills.

He said using the address to criticise the Opposition parties is unprecedented ... unethical and blatant abuse of power". "Such statements by the highest executive functionary of the country constitute a serious breach of privilege and contempt of the House," said Venugopal.

He said that "it is well established that casting reflections and aspersions, imputing motives to members of Parliament are made by

them in Parliament tantamount to gross breach of privilege and contempt of the House".

"It is appalling that the PM who wanted this Constitution Amendment Bill to pass was so annoyed that he chose to address the nation, casting aspersions on MPs who were honestly performing their duties, in this case, protecting the Constitution," said the Congress MP.

"Hence these observations by the Prime Minister cast aspersions on the independence and integrity of elected members of Parliament, question the manner in which members of the Opposition exercised their parliamentary duties; and attribute motives to their voting behaviour," he said.

Venugopal said that it was a time-honoured parliamentary convention and a fundamental privilege of every member (protected under the Constitution) that no person, including the PM, shall reflect upon the conduct or voting of any member in the House or attribute motives to such conduct. "Any such reflection or imputation directly undermines the dignity and authority of the House and interferes with the free and independent discharge of parliamentary duties by its members," he said.

EC to examine Opp's poll code violation complaint against PM

Express News Service
New Delhi, April 21

THE ELECTION Commission of India will "examine" the Opposition's complaint against Prime Minister Narendra Modi that his address to the nation on April 18 was violative of the Model Code of Conduct, sources said on Tuesday.

Following PM Modi's address in the midst of the polls, several opposition parties, including leaders of the Left, wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, alleging that the address was violative of the poll code and sought action against him. Sources in the EC said the complaint would be "examined" by the Model Code of Conduct division of Commission. The poll code came into force on March 15 and will remain in place till May 4, the day votes will be counted for the five Assemblies.

CPI(M) general secretary MA

Nearly 700 activists and private citizens, too, approached the EC on the alleged violation

Baby and CPI Rajya Sabha MP P Sandosh Kumar wrote separately to the poll panel chief, alleging misuse of the public broadcaster to influence public opinion in poll-bound states.

Separately, nearly 700 activists and private citizens, too, approached the EC on the alleged violation. "Usage of a public broadcaster as a platform for political messaging during an election by the incumbent Prime Minister creates an uneven playing field and undermines the principle of free and fair elections, which is the cornerstone of our parliamentary democratic framework," Baby said in his letter to the CEC.

THE CONGRESS on Tuesday moved a privilege notice against Prime Minister Narendra Modi for allegedly "casting aspersions" on the "independence and integrity" of MPs in his address to the nation on April 18.

The PM addressed the nation on April 18, a day after the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill-2026 was defeated in the Lok Sabha, for failing to secure the required two-thirds majority as required under the provisions of Article 368 of the Constitution.

In the notice submitted to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Congress MP K C Venugopal said: "In the 29-minute speech termed as 'address to the nation', the Prime Minister criticised opposition parties for blocking the Bill and made direct reflections on the voting pattern of members of the Opposition and attributed motives to them."

Invidious speech

ECI's inaction on the Prime Minister's violations of model code is troubling

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation on April 18 differed from a speech he made at a similar election-eve juncture in 2019, it was nonetheless problematic. In 2019, following a successful anti-satellite missile test, private news channels aired a speech by Mr. Modi extolling the mission and his government's commitment to the country's technological prowess even as the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) was in force ahead of the general election. Late last week, Mr. Modi's transgression was greater as Doordarshan and Sansad TV broadcast his speech even as he accused the Congress, DMK, Trinamool Congress and Samajwadi Party of committing the "sin of foeticide" after they blocked the combined women's reservation and delimitation Bills, and suggested that women voters would punish them electorally in the Tamil Nadu and West Bengal elections on April 23. Thus far, the Opposition in Parliament as well as numerous academics and activists have written to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) urging that the Election Commission of India (ECI) should sanction Mr. Modi for violating the MCC. In a familiar but also increasingly dispiriting turn, the ECI has yet to respond. It is expected to act reasonably quickly, as it has against Opposition parties.

Since the facts are not in dispute in this instance and the ECI's reluctance to sanction the Prime Minister has become well-known, it is hard to believe that the delay is benign. The constitutional body allowed the Prime Minister's monthly radio programme to continue broadcasting during the State polls in 2015 and 2017 and permitted NaMo TV to air in 2019 after prior approval of its contents. In 2024, the ECI issued a notice regarding a controversial speech by Mr. Modi in Rajasthan, but addressed it to the BJP president rather than to him. After the 2019 missile test, critics argued that the ECI's refusal to sanction had created a loophole whereby major announcements could be framed as 'official', thus having an electoral impact while affording the ECI plausible deniability. As the letter to the CEC specified, Mr. Modi's violation is clear if he delivered his address without the ECI's prior approval. If the ECI did approve it, it must explain why it saw fit to grant the Prime Minister this precious privilege, investigate the speech's contents, remove it from official platforms, and sanction Mr. Modi. The ECI's inaction – rendered more pronounced by the two States voting on April 23 – only reinforces its partisan character, and undermines the fairness of polls as well as its own credibility.

A year later, Pahalgam's shadow lingers over Kashmir's people and economy

ON THIS day last year, the Baisaran meadows of Pahalgam became the site of a horrific terror attack that claimed 26 innocent lives, most of them tourists.

The assault sent shockwaves not just across the country but around the globe. A year later, Kashmir is limping towards recovery; healing is still some distance away. The tragedy's shadow lingers most painfully over the grieving families and in the silent despair of countless households whose livelihoods have been impaired.

While the Indian state responded decisively with Operation Sindoor, the security forces eliminated the perpetrators in a counter-operation, delivering immediate justice. Beyond the strike itself, Operation Sindoor marked a significant doctrinal shift in India's counterterrorism policy: Major attacks on Indian soil would now trigger calibrated conventional retaliation without the need to definitively establish Pakistan's direct state complicity.

This muscular posture, visible since the 2016 Uri attack, has evoked an enthusiastic response from Indian civil society and popular culture, with a wave of films and mass-media narratives emerging. While these productions often carry a heavy dose of propaganda, their success nonetheless reflects a deepening societal engagement and a welcome hardening of the national narrative around cross-border terrorism — and unfortunately on Kashmir, too, to some extent.

Compare, for instance, Aditya Dhar's blockbuster *Dhurandhar* (2025) with

Mani Ratnam's 1992 classic *Roja*. Where *Roja* sought to explore the human and political complexities of Kashmir — its pain, its aspirations, and the human cost on all sides — the newer wave of cinema is singularly focused on terrorism itself, on the machinery of response, and on unapologetic assertions of national will. Kashmir, in these stories, almost recedes to the background as a mere theatre for larger battles rather than a land with its own layered realities.

Yet the human cost remains searing. None of the images from that day is more haunting than that of a newlywed woman holding the lifeless body of her husband, her dreams destroyed in a single moment of mindless violence. The attack claimed lives and much more. It violated the deepest sensibilities and traditional values of Kashmiri society. By targeting tourists, the assailants struck at the moral core of humanity. The incident shook Kashmiri society to its core, triggering a wave of collective grief, outrage and trauma that cut across political and community lines.

The economic fallout has been enduring and become increasingly painful. What began as an exodus of visitors in the immediate aftermath has hardened into a sustained slump. Tourist arrivals crashed through last year. Even the Tulip Festival saw footfalls drop sharply this year, from over eight lakh visitors to barely a third of its peak. The "tulip hotspot" that had begun to symbolise Kash-



HASEEB
A DRABU

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mir's soft power and seasonal promise now tells a story of hesitation and fear. The ripple effects have reached small vendors who depend on the summer rush.

The impact goes beyond livelihood. Historically, in Kashmir, tourists have been harbingers and ambassadors of socio-economic integration with the mainland, respectful of cultural diversity. Kashmiris can survive without incomes from tourism but cannot live in social isolation in Kashmir and ostracism in the rest of the country.

This is not going to be another seasonal dip. Globally, economic uncertainty looms. Recent developments in India-US trade relations and the easing of import duties on American apples have dealt a severe blow. The Indian economy faces its

own headwinds: Uneven recovery, high youth unemployment, and questions over the quality of growth. In such an environment, a local economy already reeling from one shock has little margin for error.

The anxiety goes beyond tourist spots in the orchards of Shopian and Sopore, where it is palpable. The local economy is staring at tough times and can implode under pressure.

The deeper irony is that the promised economic renaissance and genuine empowerment of the people after the political changes have not materialised in any meaningful way. Investment has not surged as hoped. The result is a J&K that has seen its political architecture altered dramatically, but whose people con-

tinue to wait for the dividends of normalcy, jobs, and dignity.

The much-hyped integration has so far translated more into administrative centralisation than into tangible economic opportunity or political agency for ordinary Kashmiris. If anything, in the weeks and months following Pahalgam, incidents of harassment, intimidation and violence against Kashmiris — students in universities, shawl sellers in markets, traders and ordinary migrants — rose sharply across several parts of the country. Many of these acts have gone largely unpunished, with little visible action to protect innocent citizens or hold perpetrators accountable. Such backlash not only deepens the sense of alienation but also undermines the very idea of a shared national fabric, which the post-2019 political changes were meant to strengthen.

A year after Pahalgam, the message is somewhat sombre and sobering. The political reengineering has not eliminated terrorism. The economic costs of insecurity are immediate and painful. And the grand political project that was meant to transform Kashmir has, so far, delivered changes in form but not in substance, where it matters most to ordinary lives.

The anniversary of Pahalgam should not merely be a day of remembrance. It must also be a moment for reflection on what has been achieved — and what, painfully, has not.

The writer is former finance minister, Jammu and Kashmir



MADAN SABNAVIS

THE RUPEE has been extremely volatile ever since the conflict in West Asia got underway. The annualised average daily volatility was 8.4 per cent in the last 28 trading sessions as against 5.2 per cent in the sessions prior. After crossing the 95 level against the dollar, the currency has now been in the range of 92.50-93.50. Clearly, the RBI has faced a challenging situation.

Aside from the usual demand-supply forces that are at work, there is also speculative activity to contend with in the mar-

Where does the rupee go from here

kets. When the currency falls, there may also be a tendency by exporters to hold back their earnings while importers may rush in to buy dollars, thereby exacerbating the demand-supply balance. Then there is also the value of the dollar — a stronger dollar makes currencies weak and vice versa.

All these factors affect the rupee at different points of time.

The RBI plays a vital part in smoothing out the volatility. It undertakes spot sales and also takes positions in the forwards market. Its interventions send a message to market participants. In addition to these, there are also regulatory changes. Recently, it capped the net open position of banks in the onshore market at \$100 million. This meant that

banks had to unwind their currency positions. The central bank has also reportedly opened a window for oil marketing companies to purchase dollars, thereby depressing demand in the open market. All this has helped reduce the volatility in the market.

So now where can we expect the rupee to move? It is difficult to say as there is little clarity over the conflict in West Asia. Any

Any news of escalation in West Asia pushes up the cost of crude oil and puts pressure on the rupee, while signs of a truce work the other way

news of escalation pushes up the cost of crude oil and puts pressure on the rupee, while signs of a truce work the other way. Therefore, volatility is likely to remain. The last couple of weeks have seen the dollar become weaker — the dollar index is now less than 100. Normally, higher interest rates in the US are signs of a stronger dollar. But at present, one does not know if the rates will remain high.

Demand for oil also remains stable. The price we are paying is still around 10 per cent higher than Brent. Hence, there will be continued demand for dollars. Another commodity, gold, is now more in a bearish phase. Export growth will continue to be impacted by the situation in West Asia. This

can put pressure on the trade balance.

Foreign capital flows will be critical. FPI flows have been largely negative since the war began, with a withdrawal of around \$17 billion over the last month-and-a-half. While the worst of the war may well be behind us, the environment remains volatile, influencing investor decisions. Net FDI flows, too, remain subdued.

In such a situation, the rupee is likely to stay range-bound in the short run, between 92 and 94 against the dollar. But a major disruption could push it towards the 95 level.

Sabnavis is chief economist, Bank of Baroda and author of Corporate Quirks: The Darker Side of the Sun. Views are personal

India's LPG crisis is the wake-up call it cannot ignore

India is staring at an energy reality it can no longer ignore. The gas crisis of 2026, marked by liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) shortages, volatile liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices, and soaring import bills, is not a temporary disruption. It is a structural warning. For a country aiming to sustain high economic growth and emerge as a global manufacturing hub, energy insecurity is not just an inconvenience; it is a strategic risk. The real question is no longer whether India should act, but how quickly it can pivot toward self-reliance.

Unsustainable energy gap

The numbers tell a troubling story. India's crude oil import dependence has reached a staggering 88.6%, with domestic production unable to keep pace with rising demand. LNG imports are projected to hit 28 million metric tonnes (MMT) 29 MMT this year, even as domestic gas production meets barely half of the requirement. Meanwhile, energy demand is expected to triple by 2047.

This widening gap between demand and domestic supply is not sustainable. Every global price shock, geopolitical disruption, and currency fluctuation directly impacts India's economy – fuelling inflation, straining public finances, and exposing systemic vulnerabilities.

What makes the situation more concerning is that existing systems are clearly failing to keep up. India has invested in LNG infrastructure, with regasification capacity exceeding 50 MMT annually. Yet, utilisation remains stuck at 50%-60% due to pipeline constraints and demand mismatches. LPG supply chains are even more fragile, heavily dependent on imports from West Asia.

The recent disruptions – which led to shortages in cities such as Mumbai and Bengaluru and triggered price spikes of up to five times – highlight just how exposed India remains.



Nagendra Kumar
Fellow and Associate Director, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), New Delhi



Manda Prashanth
Research Associate, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), New Delhi

A push towards Compressed Biogas (CBG) will ensure energy security, environmental sustainability, and rural economic growth

Government interventions have helped manage the crisis in the short term, but they are reactive by design. They do not solve the fundamental problem: India's overdependence on imported fuels.

Decisive steps to take

And yet, the solution lies in plain sight. Compressed Biogas (CBG) offers India a rare combination of energy security, environmental sustainability and rural economic growth. The country has an estimated potential of 62 MMT of CBG annually from agricultural residues, animal waste, and municipal solid waste. But the current output is just 920 tonnes per day from 132 operational plants. This is not a resource constraint – it is an execution failure.

To be fair, the policy intent is strong. Initiatives such as Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) and Galvanising Organic Bio-Agro Resources (GOBAR-DHAN) have laid the groundwork, offering assured offtake, financial incentives, and a clear vision for a bioenergy ecosystem. But progress on the ground has been slow. Feedstock supply remains fragmented and unreliable. Financing is often delayed or inadequate. Regulatory approvals can take months. And the market for digestate – a key by-product – remains underdeveloped. In short, India has built the vision but not yet the system to deliver it at scale.

This is where decisive action is needed. First, India must establish a national feedstock security framework. Without a reliable and predictable supply of biomass, no CBG project can succeed. This means State-wise mapping of feedstock availability, creation of aggregation models, and long-term contracts that give developers confidence. It also requires aligning feedstock types with suitable technologies to improve efficiency and viability.

Second, the regulatory and financial ecosystem

must be streamlined. Single-window clearance systems are no longer optional; they are essential. Project developers should not spend six to nine months navigating approvals. At the same time, financial support mechanisms need to go beyond traditional subsidies. Viability gap funding, green bonds and carbon credit integration can significantly improve project economics and attract private investment.

Third, India must think beyond waste and actively promote dedicated energy crops. Napier grass, for instance, offers high yields and can serve as a reliable feedstock. Allocating even 2%-3% of agricultural land – particularly in regions with surplus production – can create a stable biomass base without compromising food security. This is not about replacing existing crops, but about strategic diversification.

Meaningful energy reform

If these interventions are implemented with urgency, the impact could be transformative. India can scale CBG production to 20 MMT by 2030. But the benefits go far beyond numbers. A robust CBG ecosystem would reduce stubble burning, improve air quality, create rural jobs and enhance farmer incomes. It would turn waste into wealth and shift India toward a truly circular economy.

The lesson from the current crisis is clear: incremental fixes will not work. India needs a structural shift in how it produces and consumes energy. The success of the ethanol blending programme shows that large-scale transformation is possible when policy clarity meets execution discipline. CBG can – and must – be the next big success story.

India's gas crisis is not just a challenge; it is a test of intent. The country can either continue to rely on volatile global markets or invest in building a resilient, domestic energy system. The choice should be obvious. The time to act is now.

Govt. moots stricter norms for content generated using AI

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

The Union government on Tuesday mooted stricter disclosure norms for AI-generated content, proposing tweaks to IT rules that would require clear and continuous labels identifying synthetically generated information to be visible throughout the entire duration of the visual display.

In a notice, the IT Ministry said the wording “ensures prominent visibility in the visual display” would be substituted by “ensures continuous and clearly visible display of such label throughout the duration of the content, in a visual display”.

Adding this to the draft IT Rules amendment that, among other changes, also proposes to bring independent news creators on the Centre’s radar and mandate compliance with advisories, the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) has extended the deadline for stakeholder feedback to May 7 from the once-already-extended timeline of April 29, 2026.

The submissions would be held in fiduciary capacity in MeitY and not be disclosed to anyone at any stage, enabling persons to

IT Ministry extends the deadline for stakeholder feedback to May 7 from the earlier April 29

submit feedback/comments freely without any hesitation, the Ministry emphasised.

Earlier this year, the government tightened rules for social media platforms such as YouTube and X, mandating the takedown of unlawful content within three hours, and requiring clear labelling of all AI-generated and synthetic content. At that time, the government said the move was necessitated by the growing misuse of Artificial Intelligence to create and circulate obscene, deceptive, and fake content on social media platforms.

Another flashpoint in the draft amendments to IT rules is the proposal to mandate intermediaries’ compliance with IT Ministry-issued clarifications, advisories, SOPs and guidelines – a move that the civil society has pushed back against, saying it is akin to bringing information instruments not part of the parent statute into a legal ambit.

BOMBS WILL GO OFF IF NO AGREEMENT: U.S. PRESIDENT

Vance trip to Pak on hold, Iran says no talks under threat

His deadline ending today, Trump pushes for quick deal

Jonathan Swan, Elian Peltier, Tyler Pager & Farnaz Fassihi

Washington, Islamabad, April 21

US VICE President J D Vance's trip to Pakistan for a second round of negotiations with Iran has been put on hold after Tehran failed to respond to American positions, a US official with direct knowledge of the situation said Tuesday.

Iran, for its part, said it had not yet decided whether to resume talks with the US.

With the two-week truce set to expire Wednesday in Iran, it was unclear what steps, if any, Iran or the US would take next. Talks could resume at a moment's notice though President Donald Trump has suggested that he did not want to extend the truce without a longer-term agreement.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Esmail Baghaei, said Iran had not decided

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Billboards near the Serena Hotel in Islamabad where the second round of talks between the US and Iran were to take place. AP

Diplomatic road long, arduous but why 'grand bargain' remains goal

C Raja Mohan

New Delhi, April 21

AS WASHINGTON and Tehran inch towards a second round of negotiations, the idea of a "grand bargain" is very much at the centre of the complex diplomatic dynamic between the two sides. For two adversaries locked in intense and seemingly irreversible hostility since the 1979

Islamic Revolution, the very articulation of such an ambition marks a significant shift.

Yet the fragility of the moment is evident. Confusion over the opening and closing of the Strait of Hormuz; arguments over rival blockades; US President Donald Trump's optimism Tuesday about a "great deal," and his threats to attack

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Vance trip to Pak for Iran talks put on hold

whether to even go to Pakistan. He blamed it on “contradictory messages, inconsistent behaviour and unacceptable actions by the American side,” according to the nation’s state broadcaster, IRIB.

But in private, two senior Iranian officials had said Monday that an Iranian delegation was making plans to travel to Pakistan Tuesday and to resume talks. The Iranian officials said that parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf would attend negotiations with the US if Vance were there.

Speaking to CNBC Tuesday, Trump expressed optimism

about potential talks but said that the US military stood ready to bomb again if no deal was struck with the Iranian government. “We don’t have that much time,” he said.

(Associated Press adds:

Trump warned that “lots of bombs” will “start going off” if there’s no agreement before the ceasefire deadline, and Iran’s chief negotiator said Tehran has “new cards on the battlefield” that haven’t yet been revealed.

Ghalibaf accused the US of wanting Iran to surrender. “We do not accept negotiations under the shadow of threats,” he wrote in an X post.

Pakistan said Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar met with the acting US ambassador in Islamabad to urge a ceasefire extension. Dar also met with the ambassador from China, a key trading partner with Iran.

On Tuesday, the US said its forces boarded an oil tanker previously sanctioned for smuggling Iranian crude oil in Asia. The Pentagon said in a social media post that US forces boarded the M/T Tifani “without incident.” The US military did not say where the vessel had been boarded, though ship-tracking data showed the Tifani in the Indian Ocean between Sri

Lanka and Indonesia Tuesday. The Pentagon statement added that “international waters are not a refuge for sanctioned vessels.”)

Even if the sides return to the negotiating table, many sticking points remain – on Iran’s nuclear programme, for instance, and on the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic conduit for oil and gas. The threat of Iranian attacks has throttled shipping traffic through the strait, prompting an American blockade of Iranian ports that the US Navy says has forced 28 ships to turn around.

– THE NEW YORK TIMES

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Diplomatic road long

Iran's infrastructure if Tehran doesn't agree; and the questions very late into this evening over Iranian participation underline the deep mistrust that continues to shadow the talks. If even preliminary coordination remains so contested, the path to a comprehensive settlement will be arduous.

The Trump administration, however, appears committed to thinking big. Vice President JD Vance, expected to leave for a second round of talks in Pakistan soon, has framed the negotiations not as incremental diplomacy but as the quest for a "grand bargain" — an effort to secure a decisive, system-shaping agreement. The objective is expansive: a comprehensive settlement that trades limits on Iran's nuclear programme and regional posture for full economic normalisation and reintegration into the global system.

This ambition departs sharply from the logic of the 2015 nuclear deal, which was deliberately narrow and technocratic. That agreement sought to cap Iran's nuclear capabilities but

did not address the broader sources of geopolitical conflict between Washington and Tehran, or the interests of US allies neighbouring Iran. The emerging framework now aims at broadening the settlement.

In its essence, the proposed bargain is sweeping. Iran would accept stringent and verifiable constraints on its nuclear programme, potentially including a rollback of enrichment levels, tighter inspection regimes, and limits on stockpiles of highly enriched uranium. More consequentially, Tehran would be expected to recalibrate its regional strategy — reducing support for non-state armed groups and scaling back its influence across theatres such as Gaza, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

In return, the United States would move towards dismantling its long-standing and massive sanctions architecture against Iran. This would involve lifting both primary and secondary sanctions, unfreezing Iranian financial assets, and facilitating Tehran's return to global energy markets and financial

networks. The end goal is not merely arms control, but a broader economic and political normalisation.

Recent reports suggest that both sides are exploring steps that will allow each to claim early gains while preserving leverage for subsequent stages. This, of course, is easier said than done. Powerful veto-wielders in both capitals can nix many elements of the proposed grand bargain.

Internal divisions in both Washington and Tehran help generate mixed signals, weaken negotiating credibility, and undermine the entire process. Any movement towards a grand bargain is likely to be in clearly defined stages.

The most plausible pathway begins with a political understanding—a broad memorandum outlining principles of de-escalation, mutual recognition, and the desired end-state. This would then be followed by detailed technical negotiations on nuclear verification, sanctions relief, and regional security, with carefully calibrated sequencing.

Even here, the challenges are formidable. Verification of nuclear commitments, though complex, falls within the competence of established interna-

tional mechanisms. Far more difficult is the question of regional behaviour. Measuring and enforcing limits on influence exercised through non-state actors presents a conceptual and operational challenge that diplomacy has rarely resolved successfully.

Sequencing remains another major obstacle. Iran will demand credible and front-loaded sanctions relief to justify concessions; the United States will insist on demonstrable compliance before relinquishing economic leverage. Bridging this gap will require a finely balanced process of reciprocal steps, with built-in safeguards against backsliding.

Despite all the challenges, the logic of a grand bargain persists. After decades of coercion, confrontation, and failed incrementalism, both sides are confronting the limits of their current strategies. Although the obstacles are substantial, and the risks of failure high, the fact that Washington and Tehran may sit down for another round of talks is a cause for modest optimism.

(C. Raja Mohan is a contributing editor on international affairs for *The Indian Express*)

STRAIT A SWORD 'DRAWN FROM ITS SHEATH' THAT US AND GULF STATES CANNOT IGNORE: EXPERTS

Gulf worries US-Iran talks may cement Tehran's grip on Hormuz

Reuters

Dubai, April 21

A WARNING by former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev has crystallised fears among Gulf states that reopening the Strait of Hormuz may be the most Iran-US talks can achieve, falling short of the broader de-escalation they regard as vital.

Officials and analysts expect the next round of negotiations, due in Islamabad, will focus increasingly not on Iran's missiles or regional proxies but on uranium enrichment limits and how to handle Iran's leverage over the Strait, the world's most critical oil shipping route.

Gulf officials warn the approach risks entrenching Iran's grip on Middle East energy supplies by managing rather than dismantling its leverage, prioritising global economic stability even while leaving the countries most exposed to the energy and security consequences outside formal decision-making.

Gulf sources say US-Iran diplomacy is now centred less on rolling back Iran's missile programme and more on enrichment levels and tacitly accepting Tehran's leverage over Hormuz, which carries about a fifth of global oil supplies.

Although negotiations remain stalled over enrichment,



Iranian clerics in Tehran Bazaar, amid a ceasefire between US and Iran, in Tehran on Tuesday. REUTERS

with Iran rejecting both zero enrichment and demands to ship its stockpiles abroad, Gulf officials say the shift in priorities itself is troubling.

"At the end of the day, Hormuz will be the red line," one Gulf source close to government circles said. "It wasn't an issue before. It is now. The goal posts have moved." There was no immediate response from Gulf Arab governments to requests for comment on the issues raised in this article.

Iranian security officials privately echo that view, describing the Strait not as a contingency but as a long-prepared instrument of deterrence.

"Iran prepared for years for a scenario involving the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, planning every step," said a senior Iranian security source. "Today it is one of Iran's most effective tools -- a form of geographic leverage that serves as a powerful deterrent."

The source described the

Strait as a "golden, invaluable asset rooted in Iran's geography -- one the world cannot take away precisely because it flows from Iran's location."

A second Iranian source, close to the Revolutionary Guards, went further, suggesting that a long-standing taboo surrounding the use of Hormuz had now been broken.

This source described Hormuz as a sword "drawn from its sheath" that US and regional states could not ignore.

US forces board oil tanker in the Indian Ocean, says Pentagon

Associated Press

Washington, April 21

US FORCES have boarded an oil tanker previously sanctioned for smuggling Iranian crude oil in Asia, the Department of Defence said Tuesday.

In a social media post, the Pentagon said US forces "conducted a right-of-visit maritime interdiction" and boarded the M/T Tifani "without incident."

It's the latest move in the US war on Iran to stop any ship tied to Tehran or those suspected of carrying supplies that could help its government, from weapons and oil to metals and electronics.

The announcement comes hours ahead of the expiration of a tenuous ceasefire between the US and Iran, and as Pakistan attempts to broker talks between Washington and Tehran.

Ship-tracking data showed the Tifani was carrying oil in the Indian Ocean on Tuesday between Sri Lanka and Indonesia. The Pentagon described the Tifani as "stateless" despite it being a Botswana-flagged vessel.

Japan opens doors to global arms market in a change of its post-war pacifist policy

Associated Press

TOKYO

Japan on Tuesday scrapped a ban on lethal weapons exports, a major change in its postwar pacifist policy as the country seeks to build up its arms industry amid worries over Chinese and North Korean aggression.

The approval by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Cabinet of the new guideline clears a final set of hurdles for many arms sales, including of Japanese-developed warships, combat drones and other weapons.

It has been largely welcomed by Japanese defence partners like Australia and attracted interest from Southeast Asia and Europe. U.S. Ambassador to Japan George Glass on X called the move a "historic step" that will help enhance the defence capabilities between the allies.

Officials say the new arms transfer rules would contribute to deepening of military and defence equipment cooperation with Japanese partners and to the regional deterrence.

"No country today can defend peace and safety by itself and needs partners to support each other," Ms. Takaichi said on X. "There



Sanae Takaichi

is no change to our 80-year history as a pacifist nation and its pledge," she said, promising strict standards to its promotion of arms exports.

The defence industry is one of 17 strategic areas targeted for growth under the Takaichi government. The government also has increased funding for startups and academic research.

China laments move

Beijing criticised the change in policy. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said the global community including China will "resolutely resist Japan's reckless moves toward a new type of militarism."

Opponents at home also say the change violates Japan's pacifist constitution enacted after the Second World War and will increase global tensions and

threaten the safety of the Japanese people.

The new policy will "ensure safety for Japan and further contribute to the peace and stability in the region as the security environment around our country rapidly changes," Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara said.

Japan has long prohibited most arms exports. It has made recent changes because of rising global and regional tensions, but exports were limited to five areas: rescue, transport, alerts, surveillance and minesweeping.

The new guidelines scrap those limits and allows the export of equipment such as fighter jets, missiles and destroyers.

For now, such exports will be limited to 17 countries that have signed defence equipment and technology transfer accords with Japan. They also must be approved by the National Security Council, and the government will monitor how the weapons are managed afterward.

Japan remains committed to strict screening and export controls to third countries and will not offer lethal weapons to countries at war, officials said, but granted that exceptions could be made to that limit.

Myanmar's junta leader proposes new peace talks

Reuters

Myanmar's new military-backed government wants to hold peace talks with armed groups by the end of July, the country's junta leader-turned-president said, but two key rebel groups rejected the offer on Tuesday. State media reported that President Min Aung Hlaing wanted rebel groups that were not part of a ceasefire deal to join talks to be held within 100 days.

"For groups that have not yet engaged in dialogue and negotiation, we also invite them to participate by the deadline of July 31," he said, and mentioned groups such as the Karen National Union, the Chin National Front, and the All Burma Students' Democratic Front.

General Min Aung Hlaing referred to signatories of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in his remarks, a deal that was in place before the 2021 coup threw it into question. KNU spokesperson Saw Taw Nee said: "The KNU has already withdrawn from the NCA since the 2021 coup. We have no plans to return to negotiations."

CNF spokesman Salai Htet Ni said his group was seeking a federal democratic system free of the influence of the military.

Taiwan President
cancels Africa
trip, accuses
China of pressure

Associated Press

Taipei, April 21

TAIWAN'S PRESIDENT cancelled a planned visit to Africa this week after three countries withdrew permission for him to fly over their territories, under pressure from China, his office said Tuesday. "According to our understanding, the cancellation of flight permits by Seychelles, Mauritius, and Madagascar without prior warning was actually due to strong pressure from the Chinese authorities, including economic coercion," read a statement.

President Lai Ching-te was set to visit Eswatini, Taiwan's last remaining diplomatic ally in Africa, from April 22 to 26.

China claims self-ruled Taiwan as its breakaway province, to be retaken by force if necessary, and prohibits countries it has diplomatic relations with from maintaining formal ties with Taipei.

Hong Kong govt seeks to seize millions from jailed activist Jimmy Lai

Associated Press

Hong Kong, April 21

THE HONG Kong government is seeking to confiscate millions of dollars in funds and corporate shares it says are linked to crimes committed by jailed former media tycoon Jimmy Lai, according to a court document seen by *The Associated Press* on Tuesday.

The filing does not explain how the property, which it estimates to be worth over 127 million Hong Kong dollars (USD 16 million), is linked to Lai's crimes.

The government previously announced that it was seeking asset forfeitures in the case but did not disclose the amount.

Lai, an outspoken critic of China's ruling Communist Party who founded the now-defunct newspaper *Apple Daily*, was convicted in December of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces and conspiring with others to publish seditious articles.



Hong Kong media tycoon
Jimmy Lai . FILE

He was sentenced to 20 years in prison in February, the toughest sentence given so far under a Beijing-imposed national security law.

Critics say his conviction reflected the decline of press and other freedoms in the city, a former British colony that returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

The government insists that the case has nothing to do with a free press, saying the defendants used news reporting as a pretext for years to commit acts that had harmed China and Hong Kong.

India must draw a red line on U.S. unilateral sanctions

The dust – nuclear and otherwise – has yet to settle on how the United States-Israel war against Iran will ultimately end, but its impact on India's growth projections is evident. Already reeling from U.S. tariffs, the Indian economy has seen damage pile up due to the U.S.-Israel mutation of the war, Iran's targeting of Gulf countries, and now the 'double blockade' of the Strait of Hormuz by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and U.S. forces – manifested in rising energy bills, higher shipping and insurance costs, supply chain disruptions, a slump in exports (down 7% in March), and mounting inflation. The rupee's fall has resulted in India slipping from being projected to fourth spot, to sixth in terms of the largest economies rankings, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Break sanction alignment

India is by no means the only country thus affected, but as the world's most populous nation, it is bound to feel the effects more acutely. Given the little attention that the U.S. has paid to India's economic concerns, it is surprising that the Narendra Modi government continues to pay heed to U.S. unilateral sanctions amid the war. This month, as temporary waivers on many of those sanctions come up for renewal, it is time for New Delhi to unequivocally denounce them and declare that it will no longer abide by them.

A cursory list of U.S. sanctions with which India has partially or fully complied is both illustrative and eye-opening. Since May 2019, India has not purchased any Iranian or Venezuelan oil following U.S. President Donald Trump's demand for "zeroing out. India faced similar secondary sanctions from the U.S. during 2012-14, when the Barack Obama administration used them as leverage in Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) negotiations (the Iran nuclear deal).

While India reduced its imports of Iranian oil from about 18.5 million tonnes in 2010-2011 to 11 million tonnes in 2013-2014, it never agreed to halt them altogether. In 2015, following the signing of the JCPOA, India stepped up its oil imports again and also signed a strategic connectivity trilateral agreement with Iran and Afghanistan to develop the Chabahar port, along with road and rail links connecting it to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Early in his second term in 2025, Mr. Trump pushed India to end all its imports of Russian oil, adding a 25% penalty on top of existing 25% tariffs to enforce his demand. For three months – from November 2025 to February 2026 – India complied, halving its intake of about two million barrels per day (bpd) to one million bpd. As the U.S. has issued temporary sanctions waivers to deal with oil price hikes during the war with Iran, India has increased its intake of both Russian and Iranian oil, but will have to decide what to do once the waivers end.

Since the U.S. kidnapping of Venezuelan



Suhasini Haidar

President Nicolás Maduro in January 2026 and the subsequent easing of sanctions, India's intake of Venezuelan oil has also increased. Meanwhile, the U.S.'s waiver extension on India's use of Chabahar port is set to expire on April 26. Mr. Trump has also said that he intends to impose sanctions on any country conducting trade with Iran or holding Iranian funds, and will sanction all BRICS members if they seek to establish a non-dollar payment mechanism among themselves.

The result of all these on-again, off-again sanctions, waivers, extensions and exemptions is to defeat India's best efforts to diversify and broad-base its energy, food and fertilizer sourcing. India's decision not to protest the U.S. decision to go to war with Iran in the first place is presumably out of concern that the U.S. may come down even more heavily on the Indian economy.

"The sui generis 'whack-a-mole' nature of these measures only adds to their capriciousness," former Reserve Bank of India Governor Ujit Patel concludes in his book *The Great Sanctions Hack*. According to his research, the U.S. stands out as the world's main sanctioning power, having imposed 365 sanctions in the present century, with the European Union a distant second at about 133. Only 12 counter-sanctions by China, Russia and Iran are active. According to the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Department of the Treasury, the U.S. today maintains sanctions on at least 23 countries and has more than a dozen sanction regimes on specific issues (cyber-terror, non-proliferation, and foreign interference). The United Nations Security Council, in comparison, has only about 15 active sanction regimes in all.

Compliance increases coercion

It is therefore necessary to analyse India's experience with U.S. sanctions over the past decade and draw conclusions about the pros and cons of yielding to them. There is little evidence that yielding to unilateral U.S. sanctions curbs its appetite, as India's experience since 2019 shows, it instead leads to additional demands for compliance.

Conversely, when India ignored sanctions such as Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) and purchased Russian S-400 air defence systems in 2018, it faced no U.S. penalties and benefitted from the decision, as during Operation Sindoore (May 2025). The "opportunity costs" of complying must also be calculated – had India continued to buy discounted sweeter Iranian crude or Venezuelan oil from 2019-25, as it did with Russian oil (2022-25), the government could have saved billions, and built strategic energy reserves (as China has) that would have been useful today.

Had India not complied with sanctions against the Chabahar port, built rail and road infrastructure in Iran, and not curtailed its plans for the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) through Iran's Bandar Abbas, it

may have had connectivity in place that could have reduced its dependence on imports coming through the Strait of Hormuz today. Moreover, India's compliance with U.S. international sanctions has further weakened the rules-based international order and the UN's multilateral mandate.

Going forward, if the Indian government decides to turn course and announce a national resolve against unilateral sanctions, it will not only spur its own private sector to seek braver options but also inspire countries in the neighbourhood and the Global South to follow suit, pushing back on other coercive measures employed by big powers such as China as well.

The government has a number of avenues to pursue if it decides to do so – from building payment mechanisms such as the rupee-rial trade system with Iran, to developing national payment systems including intra-BRICS settlement arrangements, to using 'air-gapped' banking and financial institutions insulated from western pressure, as well as exponentially expanding renewable and alternative energy sources.

Unfortunately, by withdrawing its bid to host the United Nations Climate Conference of the Parties (COP33) in 2028, New Delhi may have lost an opportunity to lead discussions on such options in the wake of the war, but it must take advantage of other such forums to do so.

History as policy guide

Lessons from history are worth revisiting. In 1966, U.S. President Lyndon Johnson amended the United States' 'Food for Peace' (PL-480) law – formally the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954 – under which India, then suffering from famine, received millions of tonnes of wheat. Johnson's amendments, called the "short-tether" policy, limited the U.S. grain shipments to monthly or bi-monthly approvals, leading to what was called a "ship to mouth" existence for India.

That the amendments followed closely on the heels of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's visit to Moscow – where she had called on Washington to stop bombing Vietnam to make space for peace efforts – was no coincidence, although the U.S. insisted that the changes were intended to spur agricultural reforms in India.

The move, and the subsequent international pressure for a major rupee devaluation, pushed the then neophyte Prime Minister into a corner. In a national address, Mrs Gandhi vowed that India should never again find itself in such a humiliating position, and intensified efforts toward the Green Revolution and agricultural self-sufficiency. A "New Green revolution" and energy independence can only follow if New Delhi draws a red line on U.S. sanctions in the next few weeks. These sanctions do not just harm India's economy. They also seek to bend India's foreign policy to another's will, and are a blow to its proudly-held tenets of strategic autonomy.

For India to launch a new Green Revolution in energy independence, it must first rebuff U.S. sanctions