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GS Paper II – Polity

Nagaland territorial authority Bill tabled

Press Trust of India

KOHIMA

Nagaland Deputy Chief Minister Yanthungo Patton on Thursday introduced a Bill in the Assembly to set up the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA), an interim administrative body for the eastern districts. While no details were provided on its provisions, Speaker Sharingain Longkumer said consideration and passage of the Bill would be taken up on Friday.

Highlighting the development while presenting the Budget, Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio congratulated the people of the eastern districts on signing the memorandum of agreement for the establishment of the FNTA. He also expressed 'deep gratitude' to the Union government and all stakeholders in the State for making this historic agreement possible.

"This agreement reflects the government's sustained commitment to increased participation in governance and achieving measurable outcomes for our people in the eastern districts while addressing the aspirations of all citizens of the State," Mr. Rio said.

He said the State government has been working earnestly to expedite the process for the formation of the FNTA interim body and therefore tabled the Bill. The Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation has appealed to the State to strictly uphold the MoA while passing the Bill.



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GS Paper II – Polity

Women's quota Act: Centre rejects call for all-party meet

Sobhana K. Nair

NEW DELHI

The government has rejected the Congress's proposal to hold an all-party meeting on the women's reservation Act after the ongoing Assembly election campaign for four States and a Union Territory ends on April 29, arguing that any delay would jeopardise the legislation's implementation before the 2029 Lok Sabha election.

The Centre has proposed that the delimitation exercise essential for operationalising the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (Constitution 106th Amendment Act, 2023) be carried out on the basis of the 2011 Census rather than waiting for the ongoing enumeration. It has also proposed delinking population as the criterion for determining a State's representation in the Lok Sabha, and instead suggested a 50% increase in the number of seats across the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. The Women's Reservation Act, when implemented, will reserve 33% of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women.



Mallikarjun Kharge

On Thursday, Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju wrote to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge insisting that timely implementation of the Act is a shared responsibility of all political parties. Waiting for the Assembly polls to conclude, he said, would push back the timeline, as the process involves multiple, time-consuming steps.

The Congress, however, remains unmoved by Mr. Rijiju's plea. In his response, Mr. Kharge wrote, "I simply fail to understand why the government is in such great hurry to further amend a Constitutional Amendment Act 30 months after it was initially passed." He reiterated that holding the meeting after the election campaign would not hinder the implementation process.



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GS Paper II – Polity

Lapses by Census officials can invite fines, prison term

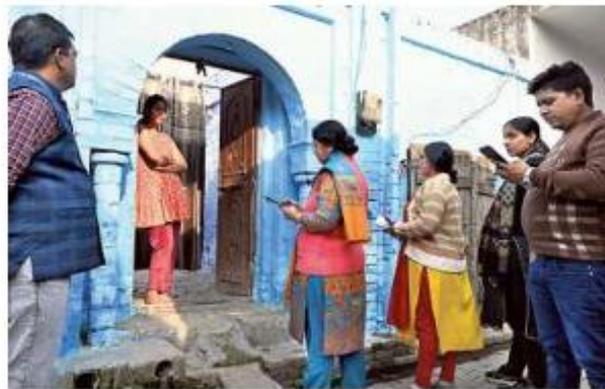
If Census officials refuse to perform their duty or tamper with any Census document, they shall face up to three years of imprisonment; enumerators must also maintain polite behaviour on field

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India (RG&CCI) has written to States that if a Census official refuses to perform their duty or damages or destroys any Census document, they shall face up to three years of imprisonment.

In a letter to the Chief Secretaries on March 17, Mritunjay Kumar Narayan said that for smooth conduct of Census operations, it is necessary that Census officers engaged in the conduct of houselisting, housing census, and population enumeration are informed of their specific duties under the Census Act. "Along with the duties, penalties have also been prescribed under Section 11 of the Census Act, 1948," the letter said. It added that Census enumeration is carried out under the provisions of the Census Act, 1948 and Census Rules, 1990.

For the purpose, Principal Census Officers, District or Additional District



A file photo of Census officials conducting a pre-test exercise for Census 2027 at Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh. R.V. MOORTHY

or Sub-Divisional Census Officers, Charge Officers, Supervisors and Enumerators are drawn from the State government. Around 30 lakh enumerators, mostly government school teachers, are roped in to carry out door-to-door enumeration. The letter said that the enumerators must "conduct proper probing while maintaining a polite behaviour" during field visits.

It informed that preparations for the ensuing Census 2027 are at an advanced stage and the first phase, i.e. houselisting and housing census, will be

conducted during April-September 2026 for a period of 30 days as notified by each State and Union Territory. It will have an option for self-enumeration to be conducted in a 15-day period just before the start of the first phase. "The period and questionnaire of the second phase i.e. Population Enumeration will be notified in due course of time," it stated.

Self-enumeration

This will be the first digital Census first to enumerate caste in independent India, and the first to give an option to self-enumerate.

Caste is expected to be recorded in the second phase. For self-enumeration, the officials have been asked to collect "SE IDs (self-enumeration identity numbers)" of households and review the data and confirm from respondent before accepting or editing the data in the mobile application for the Census.

The letter stated penalties under Section 11 of the Census Act, 1948, making compliance with Census duties legally enforceable.

It stated that any Census officer or person lawfully required to assist who refuses to perform assigned duties, neglects to exercise reasonable diligence, obstructs Census work, asks offensive or improper questions, makes false returns, unlawfully discloses Census information, or tampers with Census documents is liable to punishment. Such offences can attract a fine of up to ₹1,000 and, in cases involving refusal to perform duty, false returns, or document tampering, imprisonment of up to three years.



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GS Paper II – International Relations

Jaishankar, French counterpart discuss Iran, Hormuz at G7 meet

Sriram Lakshman

LONDON

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar arrived in France on a two-day visit to represent India as a partner country at the Foreign Ministers' Meeting of the G7 (Group of Seven) advanced economies.

The Minister held bilateral talks with his French counterpart Jean-Noël Barrot in Abbaye des-Vaux-de-Cernay on Thursday, which included an "in depth" discussion on West Asia as per the French government's readout of the meeting.

The two Ministers "agreed to continue their close coordination with a view to working jointly towards ensuring the security of the Strait of Hormuz," the readout said. The meeting comes just after Israel claimed to have killed Iranian commander Alireza Tangsiri, who Israel said was directly responsible for the closing of the Strait.

The participation of Mr. Jaishankar in the G7 meet-



Close coordination: Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar meets with France's Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Noël Barrot on Thursday. AFP

ings signified "the importance France attaches to closely associating India – currently holding the BRICS presidency – with its G7 presidency", the French government said.

International links

The Ministers welcomed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation in the G7 Summit, scheduled for June 15-17 in Évian, France and underscored India's contribution to the G7's work on addressing major macroeconomic imbalances and improving interna-

tional partnerships, as per the readout.

Front and centre of the G7 agenda this week is the war in Iran and its impact on global energy and stock markets. Discussions on the Russia-Ukraine war and the reform of multilateralism are also on the cards.

"We will work to bring about a new international order and to build a more balanced and fairer system, underpinned by a renewed multilateralism. Reforming global governance and combatting cross-cut-

ting threats require a collective commitment which extends beyond G7 members alone," Mr. Barrot said in a statement.

Bilateral talks

Mr. Jaishankar also met bilaterally with the Foreign Ministers of Canada, Japan and South Korea. Talks with Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand focused on advancing the bilateral agenda and also dwelt on developments in West Asia, Mr. Jaishankar said on social media site X.

At a session on global governance, Mr. Jaishankar emphasised the urgency of UN Security Council reforms. India and several other countries have been seeking a permanent seat on the body.

The Minister also raised energy challenges and concerns around fertilizer supplies and food security impacting the Global South.

Friday's session on Iran will only be for G7 countries and a session on Ukraine will be in the G7 and Ukraine format.



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GS Paper II – Polity

President urged not to grant assent to Transgender Amendment Bill

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A day after the Rajya Sabha passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, around 140 lawyers and women's rights activists wrote to President Droupadi Murmu urging her not to grant assent to the Bill, pointing out "constitutional violations" in its provisions and "procedural infirmities" in the way it was passed.

The letter was written by All-India Feminist Alliance (ALIFA), a pan-India collective of grassroots organisations, along with the National Alliance for Justice, Accountability and Rights (NAJAR), a forum of lawyers and legal professionals.

The groups said in their letter that they were "extremely alarmed and dis-



Transgender activists protest against the Transgender Persons Amendment Bill at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

ressed at the undue and unjustifiable haste" with which the Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

They said that not taking public and stakeholder consultation violated the mandate of the Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy, 2014.

Members of the National Council for Transgender

Persons had said that they were not consulted. Soon after the Rajya Sabha passed it on Wednesday, two members and representatives submitted their resignations, the letter pointed out.

The letter emphasised that in the *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India* (2014) judgment, the Supreme Court held

that the right to self-determination of gender is a fundamental right protected under Articles 14 and 19 of the Constitution.

Further, they said the introduction of a medical board, whose recommendation is required to "examine" before issuance of a certificate of identity, also goes against the Supreme Court's stance in *NALSA*, which rejected such a requirement, adding that this violates the "right to bodily integrity and privacy" as enshrined in the Constitution.

By removing the guarantee of self-perceived identity, narrowing the definition of who qualifies as transgender, and introducing layers of medical and administrative scrutiny, transgender people, activists and allies, say that many will be erased and made invisible by the Bill.

Transgender rights activist resigns from NHRC body

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

Transgender rights activist Harish Iyer on Thursday resigned from the position of Advisor on the Core Group on LGBTQI+ issues at the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), in protest of the alleged failure of NHRC to stand for the LGBTQI+ community.

He slammed the government and NHRC for not consulting the core group on any of the key issues before passing the Transgender Persons Amendment Bill, 2026, calling his association with NHRC 'untenable'. "The NHRC cannot claim to be a 'watchdog of human rights' while remaining perfectly content with this autocracy," the resignation letter has stated.



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GS Paper II – Polity

Why do we need a living will?

Failing to plan ahead is often what separates a peaceful, dignified passing from a prolonged and distressing ordeal for the patient and their family; a living will might be all that humans have available to speak on our behalf when we no longer have a voice, in a life filled with unpredictability.

Rajeev Bhandari

Birth and death represent the two ends of a person's timeline. A disproportionate amount of preparation, attention and care is given to the first half – ranging from the anticipation of pregnancy, counselling and check-ups, to delivery and extravagant first birthday celebrations. Unfortunately, the same attention is rarely given to the opposite end – that is death. It is often left to chance, fuelled by the vague hope that 'the right treatment decision will somehow be taken at the right time by someone'.

Therein lies the problem. No one – not even a doctor – knows exactly how their life will end, or whether they will be able to speak for themselves in their final days. It could be a relatively sudden event or a long-drawn-out process following a severe, irreversible illness. That choice isn't ours to make. Ultimately, failing to plan ahead is often what separates a peaceful, dignified passing from a prolonged and distressing ordeal for the patient and their family.

A living will is a legal document that safeguards the individual's treatment preferences for certain irreversible conditions, essentially taking the burden off relatives and doctors in deciding on treatments in specific situations. Not having one could sometimes lead to crucial treatment decisions that the patient would not have made by themselves, needlessly prolonging their suffering.

The focus of a living will is specifically for situations in which the person develops a medical condition that is terminal or irreversible. There will be no compromise in routine treatment measures for other illnesses. For instance, a college lecturer suffers a brain injury from hypoxia after a near-drowning incident in a river. The person is paralysed, opens their eyes but cannot recognise anyone or respond – a condition commonly referred to as a persistent vegetative state. This could also happen following head injury, choking on food, strangulation or a stroke.

In such situations, not only is recovery not generally possible, but the person may remain in that condition for prolonged periods – painful for the family to watch and also expensive in the long run. Another example is a person with metastatic cancer at a stage where further treatment offers no improvement, where the person may be better off receiving comfort care (palliative care) than remaining in the ICU receiving more rounds of chemotherapy that only diminish quality of life in the limited days that remain.

Most people would expect their family members or close friends to step in and take the right decisions along with the doctors. However, in reality, the situation can turn chaotic because of emotional conflict, guilt, differences of opinion and contrasting attitudes among several decision-makers – at the end of which doctors will often take the safest route



The focus of a living will is specifically for situations in which the person develops a medical condition that is terminal or irreversible. Without a living will, many terminally ill patients spend their final days in the ICU, attached to numerous tubes, unable to speak, and cared for by strangers. AP/WIDEWORLD

possible: continuing every treatment measure prescribed in the books, without considering the quality of life or prospects for recovery. In addition, our next of kin may not be able or available to make those decisions for us in the distant future. A safer alternative is for individuals to document their preferences ahead of time, when they are still in good physical and mental health, and also discuss it in advance with family members so that there is no conflict if and when the time comes.

The living will does not need to be invoked for everyone who is dying, especially when the person is still able to discuss their wishes with their doctors. The danger of not preparing one is that sometimes, other people may end up making life-changing decisions on our behalf when we are not in a position to indicate our preferences.

For instance, if a person enters an irreversible persistent vegetative state, doctors may place a feeding tube that pierces the stomach wall – because the patient can no longer swallow. Such individuals can remain in a paralysed, bedridden state for several years, sometimes a decade or longer. This may not be what the person would have wanted. In contrast, if this person had previously made a living will (advance directive) stating they did not want artificial feeding in the event of an irreversible illness, the treatment plan could shift to comfort care. This gives the person a chance to pass away gradually, in peace, and surrounded by loved ones.

The Supreme Court legally recognised these 'advance directives' in the *Common Cause v. Union of India* (2014) case. More recently, in the case of *Harish Bana* – where no living will existed – the Supreme Court enabled doctors to stop artificial feeding by classifying it as a

treatment measure, while continuing comfort care until a natural death occurred.

Without a living will, many terminally ill patients spend their final days in the ICU, attached to numerous tubes, unable to speak, and cared for by strangers. This 'disconnected' mode of dying not only results in poor quality of life for the patient but also causes profound emotional distress for the family left behind.

Clarity on treatments

A living will typically specifies which life-sustaining treatments to withhold or withdraw – such as ventilators, feeding tubes, or CPR – only if the patient has no hope of recovery. It does not apply to routine hospitalizations, surgeries, or the treatment of common illnesses. For example, a person with metastatic cancer who has written a living will to avoid ICU care and artificial feeding for their underlying terminal illness will still receive full treatment for a limb fracture or appendicitis. In such cases, if they are temporarily unable to eat, they will receive artificial feeding and post-operative ICU care just like any other patient – is help them recover.

Artificial feeding is a life-sustaining tool for reversible conditions; it only becomes a point of concern when used to indefinitely prolong a state of irreversible suffering.

Studies have shown that having a living will does not affect total survival. At the same time, it helps reduce unnecessary medical interventions and expenses.

Discussing one's preferences with close relatives and the family doctor is helpful in receiving guidance and clarity while planning a living will. Guidelines for EOLC (End Of Life Care) by The Indian Association of Critical Care Medicine and

the Indian Association of Palliative Care have been published. Templates available online can be customised – as each individual may have different viewpoints for end-of-life care.

For instance, one person may not want any form of artificial feeding if an irreversible illness is confirmed – that is, if they become unable to swallow or feed themselves. Others may agree to artificial feeding, but may not want to be attached to a ventilator if their breathing becomes weak. A third person may agree to ventilator care but will not want CPR, and a fourth may want everything possible to be done. Patient autonomy dictates that individuals have the right to decide the treatment measures they will receive – as long as those decisions are taken in a state of sound mind.

Once drafted, the document requires the signatures of two witnesses and that of a public notary or gazetted officer. A magistrate's signature is no longer a requirement in India, thus the process has been simplified.

A living will is not just for older people. Young adults may be involved in road accidents or other sudden catastrophic events and hence benefit from having one. They can always update their living will depending on any change in preferences as they get older.

To sum it up, a living will might be all that we have available to speak on our behalf when we no longer have a voice, in a life filled with unpredictability. Reserved for irreversible or terminal illnesses, it cannot be invoked for recoverable illnesses, and therefore will not affect routine medical or surgical care.

Dr. Rajeev Bhandari is a consultant, research cell, Kerala State IMA and Associate senior consultant gastroenterologist, Sarmitra Hospital Cochin. rajeevbhandari@gmail.com

THE GIST

▼ A living will is a legal document that safeguards the individual's treatment preferences for certain irreversible conditions, essentially taking the burden off relatives and doctors in deciding on treatments in specific situations.

▼ Studies have shown that having a living will does not affect total survival. At the same time, it helps reduce unnecessary medical interventions and expenses. Discussing one's preferences with close relatives and the family doctor is helpful in receiving guidance and clarity while planning a living will.

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GS Paper II – Social Justice



Faiths and fences

Limiting reservation benefits to specific religious groups is appropriate

The Supreme Court of India has reiterated a long-held, yet contested, principle of India's anti-discrimination jurisprudence – that protections and special provisions for Scheduled Caste (SC) communities will be available only to those who practise Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. The March 24 Court judgment arose from a Christian pastor who sought protections under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, in Andhra Pradesh. The Court upheld a High Court decision that any member of the SC community who has converted out of the three religions specified in the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, issued under Article 341, ceases to be an SC member. The original definition of SC included only Hindus, but was extended to Sikhs (1956) and Buddhists (1990). India's founding leaders, including first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, were clear that the extreme form of discrimination manifested in untouchability was unique to Hindu society. But political and social realities forced amendments later. SC communities began using religious conversion itself as an act of assertion and autonomy. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar himself led a mass conversion of SC members to Buddhism. Notably, he converted to Buddhism in 1956, the year when all SC communities practising the Sikh religion were brought under special provisions, including reservation.

There are theological and legal arguments for this distinction reiterated by the Court. It is often argued that in Christianity and Islam, there is no theological defence of discrimination based on social stratification. That Sikhism and Buddhism are part of the civilisational universe of Hinduism is an argument which has gained political and constitutional legitimacy. Under Explanation II to Article 25(2) of the Constitution, the definition of Hindu includes the Sikh, Buddhist and Jain faiths. Neither the theological nor the constitutional arguments for the exclusion of converts to Islam and Christianity from special protections are logically or empirically watertight, and hence the question continues to fester. Christian or Muslim converts continue to face discrimination, including untouchability, even within their new religious world. After all, discrimination needs no theological sanction. But the question of their inclusion remains a politically surcharged topic, with a commission headed by former Chief Justice of India K.G. Balakrishnan examining this. Many Dalit activists oppose the inclusion of converts within the existing quantum of reservation. Many members of SC communities who have converted to Christianity or Islam receive benefits under provisions meant for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes under Article 15(4) of the Constitution. The Court's decision is appropriate under the existing legal and constitutional scheme, and any change can only come through a political process and the legislative route.

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GS Paper II – Polity

A mislabelling of a Supreme Court handbook

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In February this year, during a hearing on a sexual assault case, the Chief Justice of India (CJI), Justice Surya Kant, remarked that the Supreme Court Handbook – *Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes* – released in 2023 by then CJI D.Y. Chandrachud to combat gender stereotypes, was ‘technical’ and ‘too Harvard-oriented’. The CJI requested the National Judicial Academy to constitute a panel of domain experts, academicians and lawyers to review the handbook and submit a report. It was noted during the hearing that the forensic terms used in the handbook to describe different aspects of sexual assault cases may not be readily understood by survivors, their families, or laypersons. The Court also emphasised the need for greater practical training of judges.

Not ‘Harvard-oriented’ at all

While the emphasis on judicial training is welcome, a close reading of the handbook suggests that it is far from ‘Harvard-oriented’. On the contrary, it is firmly grounded in Indian precedent and courtroom realities. By its own terms, the handbook sets out three modest but important objectives – first, to identify language in judicial reasoning that perpetuates gender stereotypes and to suggest alternatives; second, to highlight common reasoning patterns based on such stereotypes and explain why they are incorrect; and third, to compile binding decisions of the Supreme Court of India that have already rejected these stereotypes.

After explaining the impact of stereotypes on



Tiasha Mukherjee

Lawyer and a Master of Law candidate at the University of Cambridge

Calling the ‘Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes’ Harvard-oriented overlooks its practical, context-driven guidance

judicial reasoning, the handbook provides, in a tabulated format, stereotype promoting language alongside recommended alternatives, which are further supported by case law. The goal is to ensure that judicial language aligns with constitutional commitments to dignity and equality.

Judgments and language

Consider, for instance, the Court’s decision in 2010 in *D. Velusamy vs D. Patchaiammal*. In discussing whether a live-in relationship would qualify as a “relationship in the nature of marriage” under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, the Court used the term “keep” to describe a woman “he maintains financially and uses mainly for sexual purpose and/or as a servant”. The language later drew sharp criticism in court, from then Additional Solicitor General Indira Jaising for its patriarchal connotations. The handbook flags precisely such expressions to ensure that future judgments avoid sexist language.

Similarly, Indian judgments have at times used the word “ravished” to describe rape. The term carries archaic, moralistic undertones, focusing more on romantic connotations than on consent and bodily autonomy. The use of problematic language in judgments in India has been documented for decades by feminist legal scholars. Across jurisdictions, initiatives such as the feminist judgments project have demonstrated how landmark rulings can be rewritten without patriarchal underpinnings.

The handbook, in its final section, lists key judgments that reject the stereotypes identified earlier. These are settled principles of law which are brought together in a structured and accessible manner. For instance, it is noted that the absence of injuries in a sexual violence case must be evaluated contextually. This has also been cited recently by the Court in an order concerning sexual assault where it was noted that there is no ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ way for a survivor to behave.

Who the handbook is meant for

More importantly, to call the handbook ‘too technical’ risks misunderstanding its audience. It is not addressed to survivors. It is addressed to judges and lawyers who are professionals trained to interpret statutes, weigh evidence and craft reasoned judgments.

None of this is to suggest that the handbook is beyond improvement. The handbook must evolve, particularly in response to feedback from the Bench, the bar and civil society. But, reform should be informed by an accurate understanding of what the document actually does.

The publication of the handbook marked a significant institutional acknowledgment: that language can entrench or dismantle inequality. By identifying stereotypes and grounding judicial reasoning in constitutional values, the Court took a step toward greater internal accountability. Calling it ‘technical’ and ‘Harvard-oriented’ risks diminishing the significance of that step.



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GS Paper II – Social Security

Should men get paternity leave in India?

PARLEY



Ashwini Deshpande is a Professor who heads the Economics Department at Ushoka University. She specialises in development economics, including gender and labour issues

In a ruling on maternity leave for adoptive and surrogate mothers last week, the Supreme Court called on the Union government to examine the need for a formal law recognising paternity leave for all fathers, adoptive or biological.

It noted that though parenthood is not a solitary function, fathers are often relegated to the periphery of their children's lives, especially in infancy and early childhood, terming this "a kind of injustice". Should men be given paternity leave? Ashwini Deshpande and Sanjoy Ghose discuss this in a conversation moderated by Priscilla Jebaraj. Edited excerpts:

Why does paternity leave matter? Who would it benefit?

Sanjoy Ghose: The judgment in the *Hamsaanandini Nanduri* case sees the question not only from the viewpoint of the mother or the father, but most importantly, the child. It said that during the impressionable formative years, the child must have access to both parents as caregivers. The gendered roles that the child absorbs – that a mother's duty is to take care and the father's duty is to work at the workplace – stems from the fact that we as a society do not have paternity leave; we do not have equal sharing of the parental burden or responsibility.

Ashwini Deshpande: The Time-Use Survey data show that Indian women spend 10 times as many hours on domestic work, which includes childcare and elderly care, compared to men. When it comes to childcare, it almost exclusively becomes the responsibility of the mother, which prevents her from accessing work opportunities outside the home. It is absolutely important for the child to have both the mother and the father present. But the norm in India is that it is the woman's role. That needs to change.

While India has no paternity leave law, there is a mandate for maternity leave. How well is that implemented?

AD: Only 10% of India's workforce works in the formal sector. So for 90%, this is not applicable. Even in the formal sector, most establishments are so small that they cannot afford either paternity nor maternity leave.

Beyond the provision of maternity leave, though, there is often discrimination, where women are hired in fewer numbers or are nudged to leave when they become pregnant, or they are bypassed for promotions or relegated to lower-level decision-making.

It is a double whammy. You don't get help at



A woman labourer, who is busy plucking fruits in an orchard, arranges a soft bed for her child, near Chitravuru in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. G.N. RAO

home and at your workplace, you are discriminated against. And there is a motherhood penalty in wages. After the birth of the first child, the wage gap between couples increases, even in Scandinavian countries.

SG: We have a plethora of laws, legislation, and protections, which govern only this minuscule, highly regulated part of the economy, though many of the most vulnerable women who need this protection are in the informal sector.

The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 provides non-termination during the period of maternity leave. But employers and employees know that discrimination can be subtle. If promotions are delayed or denied, it is very difficult for a woman to prove in Court that this is directly related to her having had a child.

The vast majority of Indian workplaces don't offer paternity leave. The Central government offers two weeks to its employees who become fathers. Some multinational companies offer up to three months. The global gold standard is Sweden, which offers 480 days of paid leave per child to be shared between parents, with 90 days each of non-transferable leave. Given this spectrum of policy options, what would be most viable and useful in Indian workplaces? Let's start with the formal sector alone.

AD: In India, 480 days won't work, but I think the principle underlying the Sweden model is correct. It should be called parental leave and not maternity or paternity leave. Let the couple sort it out. But some part of it should be non-transferable so that it is compulsory for the man also to take some leave. But I think it has to be accompanied by conversations about norms shifting. Both the father and the mother need to be equally involved in the process. How many days is optimal? Well, I don't see it going beyond



The gendered roles that the child absorbs – that a mother's duty is to take care and the father's duty is to work at the workplace – stems from the fact that we as a society do not have paternity leave

SANJOY GHOSE

the six months already being given for women. So, call the same six months parental leave and insist that both parents use it.

SG: But in that model, we are assuming that the wife is also working. In many cases, if the mother is a homemaker, it will be the father who is entitled to the full six months of parental leave. My fear is that a law enacted with good intentions could have unintended consequences. It might leave a woman not only responsible for caring for her child, but also expected to support a husband who is on a six-month paid leave and not sharing responsibilities equally.

This kind of leave for fathers will only be taken in sedentary jobs. It will not happen, say, in an asset management company because it is so competitive. There are so many factors which have to be worked out. I think it is very impractical to come with a general prescription of what should be paternity leave and how it should be administered.

But we do have such a general prescription for maternity leave, don't we? However it is implemented, it is there as a right.

SG: Maternity leave is seen as a much more genuine leave, though I'm not saying that there are no caregiving fathers. But given that we are still to evolve to that level of gender justice, and patriarchy is still so rampant, you cannot blindly equate paternity leave with maternity leave.

AD: In American universities, both men and women can apply for one year's extension in the tenure clock if you had a child during that time. But research shows that young male assistant professors who get that extension end up actually publishing another paper, whereas the mothers, the female assistant professors, actually struggle with both the job and the child. So, it is a very realistic scenario in India where somebody will just sit at home for six months and will order the wife to make tea in addition to taking care of the child.

There are no easy solutions, but I think the notion that it should be parental leave, not maternity, should be the starting point. And then you work out how it should be

implemented to minimise discrimination against women and to minimise misuse of that facility.

Moving beyond the formal sector, what would it take to bring this kind of parental leave to all of working India?

SG: The stated objective of the labour codes of 2020, which came into effect last November, is to bring more people into the formal economy, so that they can benefit from such policies. So, it is a long haul issue. But also, there is a patriarchal mindset which has to go. During an SC hearing on menstrual leave, there was an observation made that it might affect the careers of women if they insist on menstrual leave. Similarly, with the sexual harassment law, it was said this will discourage employing women. This attitude has to change – that these laws will make women an unattractive human resource in the job market. This bogeyman argument cannot be allowed to hold labour rights hostage. It's a long fight ahead.

AD: 90% of India's workers work in enterprises that employ between one and 10 workers. Factories with more than 300 workers are 0.5% of total enterprises, but are talking about an industrial structure where the average number of employees per firm is very small. If you think of a nano firm with three people, and if one of them is on parental leave, you have to also think of how that enterprise is going to function. So, I think increasing the size of enterprises is an absolute precondition for parental, caregiving, menstrual, or any other kind of leave.

Or think about a gig worker. Supposing they've signed up with a platform and then the woman is going to have a child. Can she continue to work? No. So she just drops out of the labour force.

I think we live in a world of segmented labour markets and this dualism is going to characterise our industrial structure and labour force for a while to come. In countries where fathers do take paternity leave, it does have a positive impact on women's labour force participation. But in India, the larger context is non-availability of productive jobs, both for men and women. That's a big picture problem within which all of these issues are located. Patriarchal norms on gender roles do need to go, but mindsets change when objective conditions change. So I think we need to figure out what it is that we can change at the ground level.



To listen to the full interview Scan the code or go to the link www.thehindu.com



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GS Paper II – International Relations

India eyes local currency payments for West Asian oil

Move aimed at mitigating the fiscal double-hit of surging oil prices and a depreciating rupee, according to two senior officials; another objective is to save on currency conversion costs

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The Centre is “experimenting” with conducting trade with the West Asian countries in local currencies, in a bid to mitigate the fiscal double-hit of surging oil prices and a depreciating rupee, according to two senior officials in the government. Another objective is to save on currency conversion costs.

If this fructifies, it would mean India would be paying for about 80% of its oil imports using local currencies rather than the U.S. dollar. “India is working out a mechanism to pay for imports from the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] countries in local currencies,” a senior government official told *The Hindu*.

Triggers for alternatives
The triggers for this move, he explained, were the upward spiral of oil prices and the downward spiral of the rupee.

Cost cutting

With a local currency mechanism, India will see a drastic reduction in currency conversion charges, says an official

- Each conversion costs about 1-2% of the total transaction value
- About 5-6% will be saved if we just deal in local currencies
- India pays for Russian oil in a combination of local currencies and dirhams



The price of the Indian basket of oil – which is a weighted average of the prices of various types of oil from Oman and Dubai and of Brent crude – stands at \$123.15 per barrel currently, as per government data. This is up from an average of \$69 per barrel in February 2026.

Simultaneously, the rupee touched an all-time low of ₹94.1 against a dollar earlier this week, before settling slightly higher. The exchange rate was at about ₹91.3 per dollar before the Iran war broke out.

A combination of these

two factors has meant that Indian importers have had to pay much more for each import transaction conducted in the U.S. dollar, especially for oil.

According to another official in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the other advantage India will see through such a local currency mechanism, is a drastic reduction in currency conversion charges.

“It is an experiment on which we are working,” the second official said. “Primarily to save on the cost of currency conversion at

several stages.

Each conversion costs about 1-2% of the total transaction value, and so about 5-6% will be saved if we just deal in local currencies, which is a lot when it comes to high value transactions,” he added.

India currently already pays for Russian oil using a combination of local currencies and dirhams. Russia accounted for 30.4% of India’s oil imports in the April 2025 to January 2026 period.

The GCC countries account for another 49%.

Moving away from using the dollar for such high value transactions might, however, attract American ire. The U.S. President Donald Trump has in the past threatened a 100% tariff on countries looking to adopt alternate currencies to the dollar.

The U.S. Supreme Court’s decision might have removed this threat, but Mr. Trump’s determination to use tariffs as a compulsion tool remains.



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GS Paper II – International Relations & Internal Security

From beer to cosmetics, Asia feels full force of war-fuelled energy crisis

Asia most vulnerable to Middle East supply disruptions; South Korean businessman says suppliers raising prices up to 50%; cosmetics container maker scrambling to secure plastic resin; consumers rush to stock up on rubbish bags, noodles; businesses are grappling with challenges

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
SEOUL/BEIJING

From beer and crisps to noodles, toys and cosmetics, companies and consumers across Asia are bracing for a crisis as the Iran war wreaks havoc on supply chains, plastics and oil supplies, upending everyday life and sending prices soaring. For many, it is already crunch time. Choi Gun-soo, the manager of a 57-year-old South Korean factory that makes plastic films used by farmers to cover crops as well as by television manufacturers, said his suppliers were raising prices of some raw materials as much as 50%, while other suppliers had simply run out of stock.

"Since we're out of raw materials for some products, we'll have to gradually shut down the machines, and the next one to two weeks is likely to be very critical," he said.

While they weathered past oil shocks as well as COVID-19 pandemic, the impact from the war was unprecedented, Choi said, adding the company had cut production to only 20% to 30% of usual output.

"This is the first time we've been hit this hard. We're really shaken." At the heart of the supply chain disruption is the Strait of



War pangs: An employee works at a plastic film factory in Ansan, South Korea. REUTERS

Hormuz, a narrow stretch of water off Iran's southern coast through which roughly one-fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas normally passes.

Asia, most vulnerable Asia, which relies more heavily on crude oil, gas, fuel and fertilizer from the Middle East than other parts of the world, is the most vulnerable to supply disruption.

The most acute shortages right now are in oil derivatives such as naphtha, sourced predominantly from the Gulf and used in refineries across Asia to make the plastics and other petrochemicals that go into almost every manufactured product.



The most acute shortages right now are in oil derivatives such as naphtha, sourced from Gulf and used in refineries across Asia to make the plastics and other petrochemicals

Already prices for some of the fundamentals of modern life such as plastic and rubber are hitting records.

May raise costs

South Korea's Samyang Foods, the maker of the popular spicy Buldak instant ramen noodles, said a prolonged conflict could lead to a shortage of pack-

aging materials and increase costs. Ramen noodles are typically sold in packages, cups or bowls, making them heavily reliant on polyethylene terephthalate (PET), one of the world's most widely used plastics, and also key in packaging for other products from foods to personal care.

Rival South Korean ramen producer Nongshim said it had two to three months of inventory of packaging material and was preparing for the possibility that the war, which began with U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28, could continue. Yonwoo, a container maker for L'Oreal and K-beauty firms including Amorepacific, told Reuters it was scrambling

to secure stocks of plastic resin to manufacture the pots used for skin-care and cosmetics. It said there was little visibility on the material beyond June.

No supply

"The issue isn't the price - if supply itself isn't available, then without containers, you simply can't sell the product," a company official told Reuters, declining to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

"We are stockpiling supplies, but beyond that, we don't really have any substantial measures in place; we're simply hoping that the situation would be resolved by May."

The war has triggered fuel shortages around the globe and businesses from airlines to supermarkets and used car dealers are grappling with challenges including rising costs, weakening demand and disrupted supply chains.

In Japan, department store operator Takashimaya said if the crisis persisted there was a possibility that price increases and supply concerns could spread to clothing and household appliances. Underscoring the scale of the impact, fans of Japan's Wasa beef crisps panicked this month after manufacturer Yamayoshi Seika halted production, blaming a shortage of the heavy oil used for the boilers that

heat the fry the snacks.

Rising input costs

China produces close to half the world's synthetic rubber and shortages of the naphtha needed to make it are flowing down the supply chain, forcing makers of goods such as tyres and gloves to consider raising prices or shift to natural rubber.

China's output is set to fall by about a third in April due to the war, according to Xinhua Jing, an analyst at SCL.

Tyremaker Michelin told Reuters its supply chain teams were "fully mobilised" and the company was managing and adjusting deliveries to honour its contracts "as much as possible."

In India, the war has already made bottled water more expensive thanks to surging prices of plastic bottles and caps, while global brewers operating there have warned of price hikes and supply disruptions due to a shortage of gas. The high oil price and supply chain shocks are also being felt in China's southern manufacturing hub of Dongguan.

Liu Chaonan, whose toy company supplies the likes of U.S. retailer Walmart, said soaring raw materials costs were taking a toll.

"The situation in Iran is having a very significant impact on our toy industry," Liu.



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GS Paper III – Infrastructure

Panel pitches dedicated force to improve accident response on highways

Jagriti Chandra

NEW DELHI

Flagging a major gap in highway safety enforcement, a parliamentary committee has recommended the creation of a dedicated National Highway Safety Patrol to improve accident response, enforce traffic discipline, and protect road assets across the country's expanding highway network.

The dedicated patrol will draw upon "models such as the Railway Protection Force which has demonstrated effectiveness in asset protection and passenger safety across the railway network", according to a report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture chaired by Janata Dal (United) MP Sanjay K. Jha, which was tabled in Parliament on Wednesday.

The recommendation comes against the back-



The National Highways accounted for over 52,600 deaths in 2024.

drop of India recording 4.73 lakh road accidents and 1.7 lakh fatalities in 2024, with the National Highways alone accounting for over 52,600 deaths, according to the Transport Research Wing of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

According to the panel, even a pilot rollout on high-accident corridors and expressways could significantly improve real-time response during the "golden hour" (the critical

first 60 minutes after a severe traumatic injury), enforce speed and lane discipline on access-controlled roads, and deter encroachments and damage to highway infrastructure. The patrol will complement digital enforcement systems being deployed under the Intelligent Traffic Management System.

"The Committee is of the view that the present dependence on State Police forces, whose jurisdiction and priorities extend well beyond highway safety, is insufficient for the scale of the National Highway network, and a dedicated institutional mechanism warrants serious consideration," the report stated.

Separately, the committee flagged gaps in the government's approach to black spot remediation, noting the absence of data to verify whether previously treated accident-prone locations remain safe.



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GS Paper III – Environment

Toothless ban: single-use plastic rules 84% of surveyed sites in 4 cities

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

About 84% of 560 locations surveyed across four cities – one each in eastern, north-eastern, northern, and western India – continue using single-use plastic items banned across the country three years ago.

Toxics Link, a New Delhi-based environmental research and advocacy organisation, conducted a field study at specific locations across Bhubaneswar, Delhi, Guwahati, and Mumbai between April and August 2025. Its report, released on Wednesday, highlighted major gaps in enforcement and called for nationwide urgent action to strengthen implementation.

The survey teams assessed the on-ground effectiveness of the ban across a wide range of establish-



Environmental hazard: Banned single-use plastic covers and other waste littered across the Juhu beach in Mumbai. FILE PHOTO

ments, including street vendors, juice stalls, markets, small restaurants, grocery stores, religious sites, railway platforms, and organised retail spaces.

According to the study, Bhubaneswar recorded the highest availability of banned single-use plastic

items at 89% of the survey locations, closely followed by Delhi at 86%, Mumbai at 85%, and Guwahati at 76%.

“The continued presence of banned plastic items in a majority of locations suggests that enforcement remains inconsistent. Unless implementation improves and the supply of

these products is controlled, the ban will not effectively address plastic littering and pollution,” Ravi Agarwal, director of Toxics Link, said.

High customer demand

The study found widespread presence of banned single-use plastic items with sectoral variations: thin plastic carry bags, disposable plastic cutlery, cups, plates, and straws were widely found across informal markets and small commercial establishments.

Organised malls and larger retail outlets showed significantly better adherence to the ban compared to informal markets dominated by small vendors. The latter attributed it to a high customer demand and a higher cost of alternatives.

About 91% of the ven-

dors across the survey sites said customers asked for carry bags. Interactions with vendors also revealed that 55% customers brought their own bags, but many customers still expect vendors to provide free carry bags.

Satish Sinha, the associate director of Toxics Link, said that customer preferences partly influence vendors’ reluctance to transition from plastics to alternatives, including paper cups and plates, wooden cutlery, steel utensils, aluminium foil containers, bagasse plates, cloth bags, and thicker reusable plastic bags above 120 microns.

“Customers perceive disposable plates and cutlery to be more hygienic than reusable items. Our survey found that this perception, along with the cost

advantage of single-use plastics, continues to drive their use among small and local vendors, although the intensity of this preference varies between rural and urban areas,” he said.

Stronger steps sought

The report called for stronger national action by all stakeholders – government, single-use plastic manufacturers, retailers, and consumers – in line with the discussions at the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution held in Geneva, Switzerland in 2025.

It recommended more robust enforcement and monitoring mechanisms with regular inspections, coordinated action among regulatory agencies, and consistent penalties to ensure compliance with the ban on single-use plastics.

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GS Paper III – Science & Technology & Security

S-400 deliveries expedited as India enhances air defence

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

India is set to receive the remaining two units of the S-400 air defence system from Russia this year, with one expected as early as next month and the final delivery scheduled for November.

A senior official in the Ministry of Defence confirmed that India is in close coordination with its Russian counterparts to ensure timely delivery. The matter has been discussed at the highest levels.

“Out of the remaining two S-400 systems, one will be delivered next month (April) and the last one by November,” the official said, adding that the timeline has been expedited after earlier delays



Strengthening systems: India signed a \$5.43 billion deal with Russia in 2018 for five squadrons of the S-400 system. REUTERS

caused by supply chain disruptions and the Russia-Ukraine war. Earlier, it was indicated that final deliveries could extend to 2027.

India signed a \$5.43 billion deal with Russia in 2018 for five squadrons of the S-400 system. So far, three units have been inducted into service, with

the remaining two now expected to be delivered within the stipulated timeframe.

The issue of delivery timelines was discussed during a bilateral meeting between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Russian counterpart Andrey Belousov, in June last year.

CM
YK



GS Paper III – Science & Technology

Use of technology in research related to health

Use of stem cell therapy for autism



Press Trust of India

The National Medical Commission has issued an advisory declaring stem cell therapy illegal for the treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorder in compliance with a Supreme Court order.

The move is aimed at curbing illegal practices by private clinics in metropolitan and tier-2 cities that claim to treat autism and cerebral palsy using stem cell therapy, sources said.

According to the advisory issued based on ICMR recommendations on Wednesday to all medical colleges, hospitals and registered medical practitioners, stem cell therapy can now be used only for 32 approved diseases.

Mice cloning and genetic mutations



Reuters

Revealing the limitations of cloning, researchers who repeatedly cloned mice for two decades have discovered that such serial duplication triggers grave genetic mutations that accumulate over the generations and ultimately become fatal.

A total of 1,206 cloned laboratory mice were generated from a single female donor mouse from 2005 to 2025 in research conducted in Japan. There were no outward signs of trouble through the first 25 generations, but mutations subsequently began piling up until becoming fatal.

The 58th generation of the clones, burdened by mutations died a few days after birth.

Framework for animal testing



Reuters

Britain's medicines regulator said on Wednesday it will introduce a framework by the end of 2026, which would allow drug makers to ask a review of the data for drugs being developed without animal testing before applying for approval.

The draft guidance from the United Kingdom's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency aims to reduce reliance on animal studies and aligns with a broader global push to limit such testing in drug development.

The U.S. FDA too had issued draft guidance encouraging companies to reduce animal testing and adopt alternatives.

Fake X-rays and the use of AI



Reuters

Fake X-ray images created by artificial intelligence tools to resemble true results from human patients can fool not only experienced radiologists but also the artificial intelligence tools themselves, according to a study.

The study illustrates the potential for manipulation by bad actors. Seventeen radiologists from 12 hospitals in six countries reviewed 264 X-ray images, half of which had been generated by the artificial intelligence tools including ChatGPT or RoentGen. When radiologist readers were unaware of the study's true purpose, only 41% spontaneously identified AI-generated images, according to a report.



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GS Paper III – Environment

Tepid promises

India must enhance battery storage to fully use non-fossil capacity

India came in late, but it was worth the wait. A section of the Paris Agreement, under which all countries except the United States have agreed to keep temperatures from rising beyond 2°C of pre-Industrial times, requires updating their targets every five years from 2020. As of December last year, India and Argentina were the only two G-20 countries that had not announced updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) for 2035. This was despite India's Environment Minister committing at COP30 in Brazil, in November 2025, to update by the 'year-end'. The saving grace is that this happened in time before Financial Year 2025-26 ends in a week. The latest set of NDCs by India commits to, by 2035, an installed electric capacity that is 60% from non-fossil sources; reducing, by 47%, the intensity of emissions per unit of GDP and having a 3.5 billion tonne-4 billion tonne CO₂ carbon sink. This is an update over India's 2020 NDCs: of an installed electric capacity that is 50% from non-fossil sources; reducing, by 45%, the intensity of emissions per unit of GDP and having a 2.5 billion tonne-3 billion tonne CO₂ carbon sink. Thus, the necessary boxes have been ticked.

The EU has committed to a 40%-49% cut below 2005 levels. As a developing nation, India – a significant contributor of net emissions in recent years but below the world average in per capita emissions – will not cut annual emissions but promises to emit less carbon per unit of energy and source more of its power from non-fossil sources. It has also committed to being net zero by 2070 through increasing its tree and forest cover (which absorb CO₂) and the recently announced technology pathways such as carbon capture, utilisation, and storage. India's 2035 goals are easily achievable and the government has expressed that plainly. India already met its 2030 non-fossil target last year, with 52% capacity installed. The rub is that only about 25% of the power generated is non-fossil due to insufficient battery storage which is unable to harness all the available solar and wind power. The Power Ministry's National Generation Adequacy Plan itself expects 70% of the projected installed 1,121 GW capacity by 2035-36 to be non-fossil. It is tempting to laud India for embellishing its green commitments amidst a war in West Asia that has squeezed supply of a vital fossil fuel. However, without actual improvements in generated supply, these numbers mean little. With the war demonstrating the chokehold that a fossil fuel has, India must exhibit more urgency toward enhancing battery storage and improving its electric grid to better utilise existing non-fossil capacity.

CM



GS Paper III – Economics

What is driving the fall in gold prices?

Are interest rate expectations affecting gold prices? Why is a stronger dollar pushing prices down? Is a liquidity crunch forcing investors to book profits in gold? Will prices recover after the current correction?

EXPLAINER

Aranya Arora

The story so far:

Gold, long seen as a safe haven in times of crisis, is behaving differently this time since the onset of the West Asian conflict on February 28. Since the start of the war, gold prices have fallen sharply. In India, 24-carat gold, which was trading close to ₹19 lakh per 10 grams in late January, has dropped to around ₹13 lakh per 10 grams. In most crises over the past two decades, gold has either held its value or risen. During the 2008 financial meltdown, gold surged as banking systems faltered. It rose sharply again during the COVID-19 pandemic as economies shut down and central banks flooded markets with liquidity. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, gold surged nearly 10% in the weeks following the start of the conflict. "Everybody should turn to gold as a safe haven when there is a political crisis, a military crisis, a financial crisis, or an oil crisis. That's the first thing we do," Bhagwan Das, former associate professor of Economics at Loyola College, Chennai, said. So why isn't that happening now?

Why does gold usually rise in a crisis?

Gold does not pay interest, unlike other common assets. So, when returns on other safe assets such as U.S. government bonds rise, gold becomes less attractive because investors can earn a steady income from bonds. But when bond yields fall or uncertainty spikes, the reverse happens, and investors move into gold to preserve their wealth.

There is also the dollar factor. Gold is priced in U.S. dollars globally. When the dollar weakens, gold becomes cheaper for buyers using other currencies, pushing up demand and prices. A weaker dollar and lower interest rates combined – which was the case in several past global crises – are gold's best friends.

What changed this time?

Several things changed at once, and all of them have pushed gold prices down. Factors that usually support gold, low interest rates, and a weaker dollar, have all moved in the opposite direction.

When the West Asian conflict began, oil prices jumped sharply, crossing \$120 a barrel and breaching \$100 per barrel for the first time since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The war created one of the largest supply disruptions in the global oil market, according to a March report by the International Energy Agency.

Higher oil prices push up the cost of almost everything, raising fears of inflation. In response, central banks typically raise interest rates to cool demand. While rates have not yet risen further, expectations have shifted. Markets now expect rates to stay higher for longer.

When investors expect interest rates to remain high, government bonds, which pay a fixed return, become more attractive. Gold, which yields no interest, has to compete with that. Even without an actual rate hike, the mere expectation that rate cuts are off the table is enough to push investors toward bonds and away from gold.

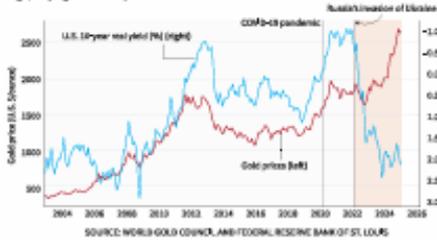
Before the conflict, inflation had been easing globally, and major central banks had been signalling rate cuts to support slowing economies. The oil shock changed that calculus.

Shifts in safe havens

Physical demand for gold jewellery has softened as consumers adjust to higher prices. But investment demand, particularly through gold exchange-traded funds (ETFs), has remained resilient.

Gold stepped following the rates in 2022

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, gold has kept climbing even as real yields have stayed high, defying decades of precedent.



"The changing expectation of central bank policy actions has been a key factor," said Kavita Chacko, Research Head for India at the World Gold Council.

Higher expected interest rates also make dollar-denominated assets such as U.S. Treasury bonds more attractive. As money flows into those assets, the dollar strengthens – and a stronger dollar makes gold more expensive for foreign buyers, dampening demand.

"The strengthening dollar increases the opportunity cost of holding gold," Ms. Chacko said. "That has been a key factor influencing prices."

Why are investors now selling gold specifically?

Gold had been having a strong run. Internationally, prices touched over \$5,000 per troy ounce before the conflict began. In India, prices hit an all-time high of nearly ₹18 lakh per 10 grams of 24-carat gold in late January 2023, capping a streak in which prices had more than doubled over two years, driven by geopolitical uncertainty, central bank buying, and a weakening dollar through most of 2022.

When prices fall sharply from such highs, a chain reaction can set in. Investors who had set automatic sell orders to limit their losses saw those orders trigger, flooding an already falling market with supply. That pushes prices down further, triggering more sell orders yet. The fall in prices feeds itself.

Compounding this is a liquidity crunch amid looming fears of a prolonged war and potentially long-lasting oil supply disruption. Stock markets have taken sharply since the conflict began, and when one part of a portfolio bleeds,

investors often sell what is still in profit to cover the damage. Gold, sitting on years of gains, is an obvious candidate.

"It is a liquidity issue. Other asset classes have seen sharp falls, so you make up for shortfalls there, cover losses there by booking some profits here," Ms. Chacko said.

Is the dollar now the haven gold used to be?

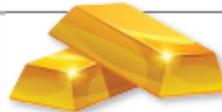
To some extent, yes, at least in the short run. There is a growing push to move away from the dollar. Its share in global foreign exchange reserves has declined from about 75% in the early 2000s to under 60% in recent years, as countries diversify into other currencies and gold, according to the U.S. Federal Reserve. But that shift has limits, and the dollar still dominates a third of all global trade denominated in it.

It remains the currency countries need when they buy oil or pay for imports. For now, when a crisis hits, the world still reaches for dollars.

When oil, also priced in dollars, becomes more expensive, countries need more dollars to pay for their imports, driving up demand for the dollar.

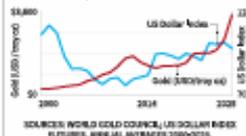
"American dollar is the go-to currency whenever there is a threat of inflation caused by rising crude oil prices," Ms. Das said. "Gold has lost its appeal temporarily. The emphasis is going back to the dollar."

But gold has not lost its shine yet. Central banks that are among the largest and most consistent buyers of gold have not stopped accumulating it. Purchases slowed modestly in 2023 compared to the three years prior, but remained well above historical averages, Ms. Chacko said. The World Gold Council's data for



For 23 years, gold rose when the dollar fell. Not anymore

A 25-year relationship that has held through wars, crises and rate cycles



"The dollar is still the world's go-to currency in a crisis. When oil prices spike, inflation fears prompt investors to pull money away from gold to ensure liquidity. That demand for liquidity has kept the dollar strong even as its long-term dominance slowly erodes."

February 2023 points to a strong rebound in central bank buying.

After the U.S. and its Western allies froze Russian financial assets held in Western banks following the Ukraine invasion, many governments pivoted to concluding that financial assets alone were insufficient as reserves.

Gold, which is a physical asset that cannot be frozen or sanctioned, became more attractive.

Should ordinary investors be worried?

Price corrections of this kind are not unusual, Ms. Das said. Gold has experienced sharp pullbacks before, including after its peaks in 2011 and 2020, only to recover and move higher eventually.

In India, the picture is more nuanced. Physical demand for jewellery has softened as consumers adjust to higher prices. But investment demand, particularly through gold exchange-traded funds (ETFs), has remained resilient.

Gold ETF inflows in India were positive for the tenth consecutive month in February, according to World Gold Council data, even as some investors booked profits. Physical demand for gold sold a similar story. While February gold imports were 38% lower than January, they were still over 80% higher in volume compared to the same month last year.

"The underlying demand is still there," said Ms. Chacko. "When there has been a correction and people see prices stabilise, there is often an immediate rush to buy. The sentiment appears to be quite positive and bullish."

What happens next then?

Much depends on how the West Asian conflict unfolds. If oil prices stabilise or fall, inflation fears will be eased, rate hike expectations will recede, and gold's appeal as a non-interest-bearing asset will increase again. If the conflict deepens and oil climbs further, stagflation which is prolonged slow growth combined with high inflation, becomes a real concern, which has historically also been good for gold.

"Price correction is a normal thing in every market," Mr. Das said. "Gold will certainly appreciate in the future. This is a temporary situation."

The short-term picture is volatile and uncertain, and how far prices will move remains anyone's guess. The longer-term forecast, analysts say, remains intact.

THE GIST

Gold prices have fallen sharply since the onset of the West Asian conflict as expectations of higher interest rates for longer, a stronger dollar, and rising bond yields reduced gold's appeal as a non-interest-bearing asset.

A chain reaction of sell orders, profit booking amid a liquidity crunch, and investors covering losses in falling stock markets has added to the downward pressure on prices.

Despite the correction, underlying demand remains strong, with positive ETF inflows, continued central bank buying, and analysts viewing the fall as a temporary situation with long-term appreciation intact.



GETTY IMAGES



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GS Paper III – Economics

India's tech spend to grow 13.4%, down from 13.7% in 2025, yet highest in APAC

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

India's tech spending is expected to grow 13.4% in 2026, slightly down from 13.7% in 2025, reported Forrester, Cambridge-based research firm on Thursday.

Although, India's tech spending would be the highest in the entire Asia Pacific region, rising costs and regulations would still impact real growth, it cautioned.

Escalating tech costs, volatile hardware markets, energy supply disruptions, and sovereignty mandates would erode purchasing power in the APAC region in 2026, the firm



Investment is rising as vendors embed AI capabilities into renewal pricing.

predicted.

According to Forrester, as Asia Pacific's fastest-growing market, India is being propelled by rapid cloud adoption and data localisation rules that are driving major onshore infrastructure investment.

Software investment is also rising as vendors embed AI capabilities into renewal pricing, while domestic enterprise demand continues to be the primary driver of India's double-digit tech spending growth.

Ashutosh Sharma, vice president and research director at Forrester said, "India's double-digit technology spending growth is being propelled by a combination of cloud acceleration, regulatory clarity, and strong domestic demand."

With data localisation shaping infrastructure strategies and enterprises expanding AI-ready platforms, the priority now is to digitize processes

beyond core systems and build scalable data foundations, he added.

Forrester estimates that the APAC region will spend over \$437 billion on acquiring new technology between 2025 and 2030.

Total spending on technology will grow by 9.3%, driven by investments in software, services, communications equipment, and tech outsourcing, but cost pressures (such as software inflation and hardware spikes), regulatory fragmentation, tariffs, energy shocks, uneven regional growth, and talent shortages would reduce the real impact of that investment, Forrester forecast.