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GS Paper II – International Relations

Date: 22.04.26

U.S. violated truce, says Iran as uncertainty clouds talks

U.S. blockade of ports and seizure of tanker amounts to ceasefire violation, says Iran; U.S. V-P's trip to Islamabad put on hold; Tehran remains non-committal on talks as ceasefire set to expire today

Stanly Johny

With the two-week truce in the U.S.-Israel war on Iran due to expire on Wednesday, Iran said on Tuesday the U.S. blockade of its ports and the seizure of a tanker in the Gulf of Oman amounted to violation of ceasefire. Iran added that it has yet to decide whether to join a new round of talks with Washington in Islamabad, even as U.S. President Donald Trump claimed that his team would "soon" hold negotiations with Tehran.

Pakistan said it has made all arrangements for the talks, but has yet to receive formal confirmation from Iran about its participation, as of Tuesday evening.

"Blockading Iranian ports is an act of war and



Iranians walking past a mural against U.S. and Israel in Tehran on Tuesday, a day before the end of the two-week ceasefire. AFP

thus a violation of the ceasefire. Striking a commercial vessel... is an even greater violation," Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a social media post on Tuesday. "Iran knows how to neutralise restrictions and how to resist bullying."

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaeri told the state-owned IRIB

Network that that "no final decision has been taken" on the talks. "The reason is the inconsistent behaviour and unacceptable actions of the American side," he said.

Mr. Trump had said on Monday that Vice-President J.D. Vance, Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, the President's son-in-law, had already left

for Islamabad. But U.S. media reported on Tuesday, citing White House officials, that Mr. Vance's planned trip was put on hold.

Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Iran's Parliament Speaker, said Mr. Trump was seeking Iran's surrender which his country would not accept. "Trump, by violating the ceasefire, seeks to turn this negotiating table... into a table of surrender or to justify renewed warmongering," he wrote in a social media post. "We do not accept negotiations under the shadow of threats, and in the past two weeks, we have prepared to reveal new cards on the battlefield."

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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 initiation 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 Venezuelian



Suhasini Haldar

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 US'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 Urjit 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 Sindoor (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.'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.

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



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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.



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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.



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Lunar governance should be multilateral

The NASA Apollo 8 mission to the moon captured the iconic earthrise image the same year in which U.S. forces were responsible for the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. Similarly, on April 6, as the crew of the NASA Artemis II mission swung around the moon in their spacecraft, they photographed the earth rising above the lunar limb – an earthset – only months after the first casualty of coordinated strikes by the U.S. and Israel against Iran was a girls' primary school. The Refugees International president called it "likely the largest number of child casualties in a single U.S. military attack" since My Lai.

In Washington, the administration was simultaneously dismantling legal protections for immigrants, imposing tariffs which fall afoul of trade law, and enabling an Israeli military campaign in Gaza that the International Court of Justice has been scrutinising for genocide since January 2024. Thus, the country that asks the world to celebrate humankind's return to the moon has demonstrated a simultaneous contempt for human rights and international law.

Disregard for law, due process

The International Commission of Jurists and the Red Cross have found that U.S. and Israeli forces have struck multiple sites protected by international humanitarian law. Before the assault, the Pentagon had dismantled the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence and shelved a framework to avoid civilian harm, among other measures. In 2025, a UN commission confirmed that Israel was responsible for the ongoing genocide in Gaza, and the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israel's prime minister and former defence minister for war crimes. However, the U.S. continued to supply arms to Israel and responded to the warrants with sanctions against officials.

The Trump administration has



Vasudevan Mukunth

The U.S. asks the world to celebrate humankind's return to the moon. At the same time, it has demonstrated a simultaneous contempt for human rights and international law

also invoked the International Emergency Economic Powers Act in an unusual way to impose sweeping tariffs. While the World Trade Institute found the move violated the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, there could be no relief as the U.S. has been blocking new appointments to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Appellate Body since 2019. Affected countries could file complaints and the U.S. could appeal, but the appeals would languish with a body that had been hollowed out.

Additionally, the U.S. administration has deported Venezuelan migrants, many with no gang affiliation, to notorious prisons – a process that the U.S. Supreme Court said violated due process rights. Independent estimates indicate that in Mr. Trump's second term as president, around six lakh people have so far been deported for alleged illegal immigration. Donald Trump has also asked whether due process protections should apply in such cases, as his administration continues to highlight the "success" of his deportation programme.

All these actions are of a nation whose principal policy is unmitigated self-interest, commitments be damned. And given the sustained manner in which the U.S. has applied this policy, it supersedes the universalism NASA invoked when it called its Artemis II mission "humanity's return to the moon".

Doesn't inspire confidence

In 2015, the U.S. passed a law that allows its citizens to possess, use, and sell resources extracted from the moon, and which the Artemis Accords use as a governing norm. Legal expert Christopher Newman has argued that the Accords are thus a mechanism for the U.S. to force other countries to accept its interpretation of resource rights. The lunar south pole contains water ice that can be used to make rocket fuel, enabling missions to Mars and beyond, but it is

available only in finite quantities in a few locations. The Accords also introduce "safety zones" around lunar sites ostensibly to prevent harmful interference. They could in practice create exclusion zones around resource-rich areas, allowing early movers to consolidate control without formally violating the Outer Space Treaty. Thus, as the frameworks for managing these resources remain underdeveloped, the country moving fastest to fill the gap is one whose recent conduct inspires the least confidence.

The way forward

The U.S.'s space governance framework is more transparent than China's. The Accords also articulate principles of peaceful use and emergency assistance. However, Chinese leadership is not the sole alternative to U.S. leadership. The more important question is whether we should allow either power to set the rules unilaterally for a domain that belongs to all of humankind. Even the Accords sidestep the multilateral process of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space in favour of forging bilateral agreements, while still formally acknowledging the Committee's role. In fact, they risk allowing practices among a subset of states to become the industry's rules before other states can reach consensus through multilateral negotiations. If the U.S. expects to be a credible leader in space, it must desist from erecting a governance architecture for the moon that, by excluding China, effectively sets up a confrontation. Instead, it must pursue treaty-level rules on lunar resources that give all nations a stake. This requires the U.S. to engage with the 1979 Moon Agreement, which calls for an international regime to govern their exploitation. While the claim that the Agreement deters private investment has merit, that is no reason to foreclose a multilateral framework.

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The cost of bringing down inflation in India, U.S. and U.K.

While the Fed pulled it off at near-zero cost to the U.S. economy, Britain paid with a recession; India avoided a downturn but now faces a currency crisis

DATA POINT

Arreana Arora

Crude oil has crossed \$120 a barrel since the conflict in West Asia began. Central banks that spent the last three years fighting the worst inflation in four decades are now staring down the barrel of another inflationary shock.

The last time central banks were faced with this dilemma was in 2022, when the world was reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2022 and 2023, the U.S. Federal Reserve (Fed), the Bank of England (BoE), and India's Reserve Bank of India (RBI) all raised interest rates in response to inflation. By 2025, prices had broadly retreated toward targets. But how much did it cost to get there?

Economists use a concept called the sacrifice ratio which measures the loss in economic output for every percentage point of inflation tackled. In the U.S., inflation peaked at 9.1% in June 2022. In Britain, the BoE watched prices rise by 11.1% in October that same year, the country's highest reading since 1981. In India, retail inflation touched 7.8% in April 2022, breaching the 2% to 6% target band set by the RBI.

Pandemic-era supply disruptions, trillions in government stimulus, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine pushed prices up globally. Chart 1 shows when each central bank raised interest rates between 2021 and 2025, and when they began to pull back.

How the Fed's bet paid off

When inflation surged in 2021, most economists expected the Fed would have to trigger a recession to bring it down. The Fed began raising rates in March 2022, eventually hiking it by 11 times to a peak of 5.25% to 5.50% by July 2023.

Despite these aggressive rate hikes, the U.S. economy avoided a downturn. Supply chain bottle-

necks ended faster than anticipated, energy prices fell and demand was robust. As a result, inflation was brought under control at an unusually low cost.

Economists estimated the U.S. sacrifice ratio at close to near-zero, meaning the economy gave up almost nothing in lost output for each percentage point of inflation it shed. Even though recession was avoided, the 2021-22 surge permanently raised the cost of groceries, rent, and fuel.

Britain's costly attempt

The BoE moved sooner, raising rates in December 2021, yet the country's inflation didn't budge. Britain relies heavily on imported energy, and its consumers were particularly exposed when Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent European gas prices soaring. A labour shortage pushed wages and the prices of services up.

The bank raised rates from 0.1% to a peak of 5.25% by August 2023, its fastest ever tightening cycle. The economy tipped into recession in late 2023. Britain's sacrifice ratio was hit accordingly. The economy absorbed a meaningful contraction in its output. Unemployment climbed to 5.2% in late 2025 from 3.8% in early 2024. CPI inflation was still 3.0% in February 2026, a full percentage point above the BoE's 2% target. While the Bank has been cutting rates since August 2024, the new energy shock from the West Asian conflict is expected to push inflation further, to between 3% and 3.5% in the coming months.

India's challenge

In India, the Monetary Policy Committee raised the repo rate – the rate at which the RBI lends to commercial banks – from 4% to 6.5% between May 2022 and February 2023, and held it there until early 2025. Through FY26, it cut rates by a cumulative 125 basis points. But at its April 2026 meeting, with the West Asian conflict pushing oil prices above \$120 a barrel, the RBI

paused the repo rate at 5.25% signalling that the easing cycle was on hold.

India's growth rate slowed from above 8% in 2023-24 to 6.5% in 2024-25, even as GDP didn't contract. Retail inflation fell from 5.4% in 2023-24 to 2.1% by mid-2025. The country's growth has slowed but the economy did not collapse and inflation has come down substantially. But, this outcome can at least partly be explained by the structure of India's economy. The RBI has itself acknowledged that rate changes take longer to filter through India's economy.

The numbers also reflect how inflation behaves in India. Food accounts for nearly 46% of India's consumer price basket, far higher than in the U.S. or the U.K., and food prices are driven more by seasonal patterns and government support prices than by RBI-set interest rates. When the RBI raises rates, it can dampen urban demand but it has limited power over factors that most directly affect consumers' wallets in India.

Chart 2 shows how inflation surged and retreated across all three economies between 2021 and 2025.

The rupee has also been hit hard in the conflict. It hit a record low of 95.22 per dollar on March 30, 2026, capping its steepest fiscal-year decline in over a decade. A weakening rupee makes imports more expensive. The April pause is, in part, a recognition of this bind – cutting rates further risks accelerating the rupee's slide, while hiking risks strangling a slowing economy.

All three central banks raised rates and brought inflation down, but the consequences varied sharply. The Fed absorbed the shock with minimal damage and a near-zero sacrifice ratio. Britain paid heavily in lost growth and a recession, and still missed its inflation target. India avoided a downturn, with a low sacrifice ratio, but is now facing a new front of pressure through its currency.

Cost of curbs

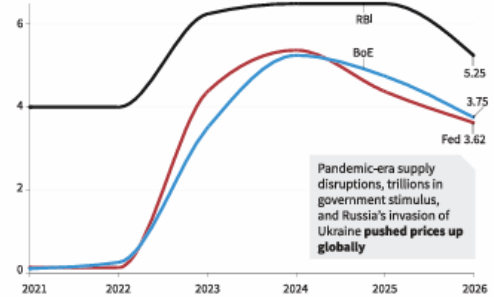


Data for the charts were sourced from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.K. Office for National Statistics, MoSPI, the Fed, Bank of England and Reserve Bank of India

1 In the process of curbing inflation, the U.S.'s Fed absorbed the shock with minimal damage, Britain paid heavily in lost growth and a recession, and India's currency took a hit

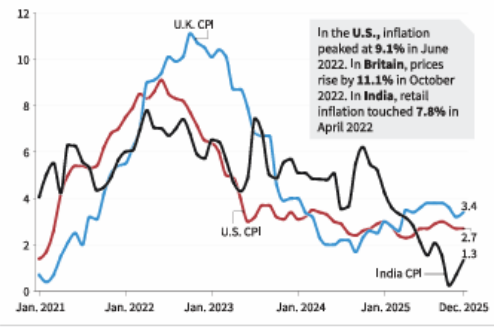
2 India's Monetary Policy Committee raised the repo rate to 6.5% in February 2023, and held it there until early 2025

Chart 1: The interest rates set by the central banks of select countries on January 1 of each year between 2021 and 2026 (in %). Between 2022 and 2023, the Fed, BoE, and India's RBI all raised interest rates in response to inflation



Pandemic-era supply disruptions, trillions in government stimulus, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine pushed prices up globally

Chart 2: The chart shows inflation in the U.S., the U.K. and India between January 2021 and December 2025 (in %)



In the U.S., inflation peaked at 9.1% in June 2022. In Britain, prices rise by 11.1% in October 2022. In India, retail inflation touched 7.8% in April 2022



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Understanding Kshatriyaisation and its relevance in contemporary India

The celebration of the Kshatriya identity by communities like Marathas, Jats, Yadavs, Thevars, and Nairs illustrates the concept of 'Kshatriyaisation'. This assertion of caste pride helps consolidate political support while reinforcing existing caste hierarchies

Aparajay

In the recent past, warrior men and women like Maharaja Suheldev from Uttar Pradesh, Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar from Maharashtra, Veeramangai Rani Velu Nachiyar from Tamil Nadu, Rani Abbakka from Karnataka, Rani Durgavati from Madhya Pradesh, Lachit Borphukan from Assam, the Travancore ruler Marthanda Varma from Kerala, and Veer Kunwar Singh from Bihar, among others, have been celebrated by various BJP-RSS affiliated fronts for fighting against Portuguese, Dutch, British, Mughal, and Afghan rulers in different parts of India. This is in addition to figures like Shivaji, Maharana Pratap, and Prithviraj Chauhan, who were already being celebrated by the BJP-RSS for their martial prowess. Do these celebrations have any precedence? Is there a conceptual lens, which can help us understand the sudden spurt in these celebrations? Do these celebrations have any socio-political relevance in contemporary India?

Historical precedence

A cursory glance at reality tells us that there are indeed socio-political groups associated with jatis. Communities like Nairs and Ezhavas in Kerala; Vainnyars and Thevars in Tamil Nadu; Gonds in Madhya Pradesh; Marathas in Maharashtra; Rajbanshi in West Bengal and Assam; Ahom in Assam; Kurmi/Patels, Yadavs, Jats, Kayastha, Rajbhars, and Pasis in North Indian States, among others, who have periodically reiterated through the media (and social media in recent times) their claims of having performed Kshatriya varna functions as militia and elite landholders in various regimes in the past.

There is a historical precedence to these claims. Akhil Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha was established in 1897, at the

initiation of Rajput leader Raja Balwant Singh Ji Avagarj in coordination with Thakur Umrao Singh Ji. Simultaneously, many other claimants, whom Rajput organisations as well as the then British government did not recognise as Kshatriya, formed similar organisations. The formation of organisations such as the Akhil Gomantak Kshatriya Maratha Samaj (1940), Ahir Yadav Kshatriya Mahasabha (1910), All India Kurmi Kshatriya Mahasabha (1894), Vanniyakula Kshatriya Mahasabha (1888), Dushashan Bansiya Kshatriya Mahasabha during this period is also well known. MSS Pandian (2013) and A R Venkatachalapathy (2010) note that during the same period in present-day Tamil Nadu, Nadars and Vanniyars were in a bitter struggle to claim Kshatriya status. Thevars (Mukkulathor) in Tamil Nadu also frequently claimed Kshatriya status in petitions to the British administration and during post-independence social mobilisation.

Socio-psychological explanation

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, in his seminal work 'Castes in India', invoking the work of economist Walter Bagehot, and sociologist and psychologist Jean Tarde's laws of imitation, emphasised the role of "the infection of imitation" in the formation of many castes in India.

This is the bedrock on which sociologist M.N. Srinivas's concept of Sanskritization (1952) seems to rest. Srinivas suggested that apart from Brahminical model of Sanskritization, there could be Kshatriya or Vaishya or Shudra model of Sanskritization as well. In fact, S.K. Srivastava in 1963, found that in rural Agra both underprivileged castes and Brahmins, especially when they became a land-owning class and zamindars, were "kshatriyaising" themselves "in order to acquire the status of landlord rather than of the Brahmin priest".

Hermann Kulke, an eminent German

Indologist and historian, who worked extensively on Odisha's rich history, died recently on March 10, 2026. His work focused on state formation, kingship, and religious legitimisation in early medieval India. Kulke's research has been particularly influential in the study of regional political structures in eastern India, especially Odisha. Kulke (1976), while recognising the Kshatriya model of Sanskritization, where other castes adopt Kshatriya rites and status symbols, distinguished it from Kshatriyaisation. According to Kulke, in a "functional sense", Kshatriyaisation could be called social change "from above" which was initiated in tribal areas by the Kshatriyas, i.e., zamindars, chiefs or rajas to strengthen their claims to legitimacy in the society and to broaden the basis of their economic and political power. He went on to show that in 17th and 18th century Odisha, regional rulers "encouraged Kshatriyaisation "from above" by granting special rights and status symbols to" tribal chiefs. This "transmission of Kshatriya values, rites and status symbols" from above were complementary to Sanskritization "from below". He makes an important point that Kshatriyaisation "from above" whereby "the temples of the powerful tribal gods and goddesses regain their previous dominating positions" can be superficially seen as "a process of de-Sanskritization or even re-tribalisation", which may not be actually so. Thus, Kshatriyaisation was not merely a social process but also a political strategy of legitimisation, allowing rulers of diverse origins to become integrated into the hierarchical order of caste and kingship. He presented these examples as evidence of the fact that a "changing India need not necessarily be a modern India".

Sociologist André Beteille (1991) also argues that modern caste hierarchy is shaped increasingly by power, class, and politics rather than ritual status alone.

Similarly, French political scientist Christophe Jaffrelot (2003) shows that caste groups mobilise politically by constructing historical identities and claims to warrior or ruling status.

Contemporary socio-political relevance

The celebration of the Kshatriya identity by communities like Marathas, Jats, Yadavs, Thevars, and Nairs, actively promoted by the BJP-RSS, illustrates Kulke's concept of "Kshatriyaisation", where martial or landholding groups assert higher varna status to legitimise their social authority. Moreover, by linking historical warrior roles to contemporary Hindu nationalist narratives, these claims reinforce both caste pride and political allegiance, strengthening vote banks for the party. Significantly, this process demonstrates how the caste system persists and sustains. The ritual and historical hierarchies are continuously reinterpreted, codified, and mobilised to reproduce social stratification, even as communities seek upward mobility through Sanskritization or Kshatriyaisation. Thus, political appropriation of castes as historically warrior communities not only consolidates power but also perpetuates the structural inequalities entrenched in the caste framework. By linking historical warrior roles to Hindu nationalist narratives, these claims consolidate political support while reinforcing caste hierarchies. In summary, the RSS-BJP's use of Kshatriyaisation is a strategic reinterpretation of history to transform passive Hindu identity into an active, assertive, and political "warrior" identity, which they use to claim socio-political legitimacy for their "Hindu Rashtra" project.

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GS Paper II – International Relations

India-Africa Summit to focus on development initiatives

The upcoming summit is being held more than a decade after the third IAFS in October 2015; will provide India with an opportunity to take stock of its strategic and diplomatic footprint in Africa

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

Development initiatives, education, capacity building, expansion of diplomatic footprint, and defence cooperation are expected to be on the agenda when New Delhi hosts the Fourth India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) 2026 in May-end, official sources said on Tuesday. Plans for the summit will be presented by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday, the Ministry of External Affairs has announced.

India has been holding consultations with partner countries in Africa as the plans for the IAFS have been under way for some time. In March, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal met with Ministers and diplomats of the Africa Group members on the sidelines of the 14th World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Conference in Yaoundé, Cameroon where he discussed plans for expanding India's investment agenda in Africa and the upcoming summit in India.

The upcoming summit



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar chairing a consultative committee meeting on India-Africa ties in New Delhi on April 7. ANI

is especially significant as it is being held after more than a decade as the third IAFS was held in October 2015. The fourth IAFS has an additional dimension as it is being organised against the backdrop of supply chain disruption that has gripped the global economy following U.S.-Israel attack on Iran.

Stable supply chain

Analysts are saying that unlike the energy disruption in the Gulf region, Africa does not have a similar supply chain shock potential for India as despite nearly 50 conflicts on the continent, supply chains of

critical items remain stable.

However, India will have to ensure that it matches its commitment to African states with implementation. "As of now, India is able to implement only 40% of what it commits to Africa. This has to improve significantly so that what India commits is fully implemented on the ground in Africa," said Ajay Dubey, Distinguished Fellow at the Chintan Research Foundation (CRF).

Mr. Dubey pointed out that Line of Credit was no longer popular in Africa where countries now expect India to come up with

Foreign Direct Investment. "For that, Indian big business has to step in. But can they avoid the western dominance of African continent while investing in critical areas? That is what we have to see," said Mr. Dubey, arguing that Indian attempts for engaging Africa in "small and medium enterprises" was not attractive to African partners anymore as they were looking for investments from the Global South leaders as well.

The summit will provide India with an opportunity to highlight some of the latest initiatives that the Government of India has undertaken like the opening of the IIT Madras campus in Zanzibar and it will also provide India to take stock of its strategic and diplomatic footprint in the vast continent.

India has already opened 16 new missions in Africa since 2018 which has pushed India's diplomatic presence to 45 countries in the continent and the summit will provide an opportunity to take stock of its diplomatic outreach among the member countries of the African Union.



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GS Paper II – Polity

SC directs committee to formulate plan for disabled-friendly prisons

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked a high-powered committee, tasked with streamlining and improving open correctional institutions across the country, to expand its ambit and formulate a comprehensive plan to make prisons disabled-friendly while taking into consideration security requirements. The panel is chaired by Justice S. Ravindra Bhat (retd), former Supreme Court judge.

“The rights of prisoners with disabilities must be recognised and effectuated in a manner that accords with a humane, rights-based approach, ensuring that incarceration does not, in any manner, dilute or abridge the fundamental protections enshrined under Articles 14 [right to equal treatment] and 21



[right to dignified life] of the Constitution,” a Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta observed in an order.

The order is the latest in a series passed by the Supreme Court on a petition filed by Sathyan Naravoor, represented by advocates Kaleeswaram Raj and Thulasi K. Raj, highlighting the traumatic and inhumane prison conditions suffered by activists G. Saibaba and Stan Swamy.

The demise of Saibaba, a

scholar and human rights activist with disabilities, was directly attributable to his deteriorating health, exacerbated by prolonged incarceration and the inhumane conditions of his detention. Mr. Swamy, who suffered from Parkinson's syndrome, was denied a sipper cup in prison.

In an earlier order in February, the court had made it clear that prison authorities who abuse disabled prisoners would be penalised under the Right to Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD) Act.

On Tuesday, the court found that a high-powered committee was already in existence, though its functions were currently in a nascent stage, to recommend reforms in the prison system. The committee included as members the Chief Secretaries and Directors-General of Prisons of States and Union Territo-

ries, the National Legal Services Authority and the Secretaries of the Ministries of Home; Social Justice and Empowerment; Law and Justice; and Women and Child Development.

The court order on Tuesday said the Secretary of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Government of India, and the Secretaries of the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment of all States and Union Territories to the panel. “High-Powered Committee shall formulate a comprehensive and implementable action plan for the provision of appropriate assistive devices, mobility aids and other necessary support equipment to prisoners with disabilities, ensuring that such measures are tailored to their specific needs and functional requirements,” the court ordered.



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GS Paper III – Economic Development

Lustre or bluster?

India's economic mettle will be on test
as it faces headwinds

Data are now beginning to accumulate, revealing the slowdown in the Indian economy brought on by the crisis in West Asia. The latest is the Index of Eight Core Industries. The data for March, the first month since the war broke out, show that these eight key industrial sectors together contracted by 0.4% over their level in March last year. This was the worst performance in 19 months but was not unexpected. The supply constraints, fuel shortages, and general subdued economic sentiments due to the conflict were bound to take a toll on the economy, especially given India's dependence on imports. The private sector Manufacturing PMI for March also revealed a considerable slowdown, citing fewer fresh orders. Yet, the core sector data nonetheless make for a sobering read. Of the eight sectors, four contracted, one remained flat, and two witnessed sharp slowdowns. Notably, the worst performer was the fertilizer sector. This, too, was expected given the constraints on natural gas imports. While the domestic natural gas sector grew by a relatively robust 6.4%, the fertilizer sector contracted by 24.6% in March 2026. The implications of this are severe. The agriculture sector is already set for a tough year, with the India Meteorological Department predicting an El Niño-impacted below-normal monsoon this year. A poor harvest has a direct impact on rural demand, which is already far from robust. Sharp slowdowns in steel and cement production also show that construction activity has taken a hit as companies pause new investments. All of this – compounded by poor performances in the coal, crude oil, petroleum products and electricity sectors – dragged the overall index to its lowest full-year growth in 2025-26 since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the economy.

Most of the factors driving this recent slowdown are external. However, if they persist, they could turn India's economic tailwinds into substantial headwinds. The Narendra Modi government's first term was characterised by low inflation and high foreign investment. Domestic political momentum was such that voters also forgave devastating policy missteps such as demonetisation. The pandemic and the global turn away from China also worked to India's advantage in terms of foreign direct investment in the second term. Low oil prices in the beginning of the third term, leading up to the war in Iran, helped inflation stay low. Yet, signs were emerging that foreign investors, spooked by India's trade frictions with Donald Trump, were cooling off on the India story. Now the war has made it painfully clear that India is hostage to global dynamics. Inflation is rearing its head again. This, along with continued stagnation in household real incomes, means that the government will have to work that much harder to restore India's 'bright spot' sheen.

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GS Paper III – Economic Development

Challenges for India's informal urban workforce

The recent workers' protest in Noida draws attention to the precariousness of India's urban centres

ECONOMIC NOTES

Tikender Singh Panwar

The recent protests of workers engaged in various industrial units in Noida point to the extreme precariousness of India's urban centres. These protests are just the tip of the iceberg and may emerge in other parts of urban India as well. Over the past few decades, the bargaining power of workers, especially in the informal sector, has steadily declined vis-à-vis the state (municipal, State, and Union institutions) and their employers.

The informal workforce constitutes around 90% of India's total employment. In urban areas, according to Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), regular wage or salaried employment remains low, which means that a vast majority of the

workforce operates in informal roles.

What went wrong is a long story rooted in the transformation of urban production systems. Cities have shifted from hubs of industrial production to centres of social reproduction. In simple terms, formal industry has declined in city centres – seen in the closure of Mumbai's mills and Ahmedabad's textile plants. As a result, urban spaces have ceased to be centres of organised labour and have become fragmented, where the primary concern is managing precarious lives, also known as the urbanisation of social reproduction. Put simply, the focus has shifted to survival: cooking, cleaning, raising children and securing basic needs like water.

From rights to need-based services

The shift also altered basic services and the role of the state. What Washington Consensus, a term coined by John

Williamson, described became the guiding approach to development. Under this framework, the state moved away from providing rights-based services such as water, education, health and environmental protection. Instead, it adopted a need and growth-driven model focused on fiscal discipline, tax reforms, trade liberalisation and privatisation.

The precariousness of the urban worker is a unique intersection of informal labour, land tenure insecurity, and the high cost of living in cities. Around 40% of urban poor live in slums. They spend between 30% to 50% of their monthly income on rent for informal housing (slums and chawls), which often lacks basic sanitation and legal protection. Around 60% of India's urban informal settlements are located in low-lying flood prone areas or hazardous sites.

This is compounded by the

privatisation of the essential services, like the transition of water and electricity to market based user-fee models; gentrification and eviction of slums to 'world class' infrastructure and high-end real estate; the dilution of labour laws; usurping of urban commons, where nature and natural spaces were increasingly commoditised. In housing, the state has transitioned from being a direct provider to an enabler of private real estate. Public land once reserved for low-income housing began to be diverted to high end projects.

According to the RBI Bulletin 2025, due to a lack of collateral, the urban poor often bypass formal banking in favour of local money lenders, leading to chronic debt traps.

Urban intersectionality

The Kerala Urban Commission has tried to look at the urban policy from multiple perspectives, including that of working people. The 'workers council' in the city council is one of the ways of reclaiming such spaces, where informal sector workers become co-producers of urban governance and development. In the urban helix of climate change, disasters and precarious development processes, it is important to build multiple intersectionalities between organised trade unions and informal sector workers. (Tikender Singh Panwar is a member of the Kerala Urban Commission.)

THE GIST

Over the past few decades, the bargaining power of workers, especially in the informal sector, has steadily declined vis-à-vis the state and their employers.

The intersection of informal labour, land tenure insecurity and the high cost of living in cities has heightened the precariousness of urban workers.



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GS Paper III – Economic Development

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.



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GS Paper III – Science & Technology

Peripheral neuropathy: why only some mutations cause disease

Long nerves in our limbs may be particularly sensitive to even slight interference from particular mutations; if researchers can find ways to target and block the mRNA or protein made from the mutant genes, it might be possible to treat inherited peripheral neuropathies

D.P. Kasbekar

Inherited peripheral neuropathies (IPN) are cruel genetic diseases that affect around 1 in 2,500 individuals. A person affected by IPN develops high foot arches, curled toes, thin calves, and walks awkwardly or trips. Their fingers may become clawed and, because they lose sensation, they may not notice minor injuries. In some cases, the weakness of the muscles supporting the torso can lead to a curved spine.

Mutations in more than 100 genes can cause IPN, including in seven of the 37 genes that code for enzymes called aminoacyl-tRNA synthetases (ARS). However, only some mutations in the ARS genes result in peripheral neuropathy. Others do not.

A research team led by scientists at the University of Michigan Medical School in the U.S. has now found why this is so. The disease-causing mutations were found to have a dominant-negative property, meaning the faulty protein created by the mutations doesn't just stop working; it actively interferes with the healthy version.

The findings now offer medical researchers a way to devise therapies.

The findings were published in two papers: one in 2023 in the journal *Human Molecular Genetics* and the other, this January in *Human Genetics and Genomics Advances*.

When two is less than one

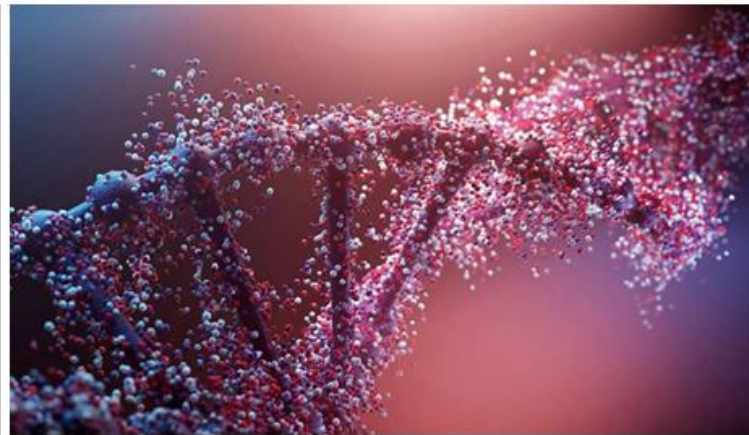
Each one of us possesses two copies of every gene, one copy inherited from each parent. An ARS gene bearing a dominant-negative mutation makes a non-functional mutant protein. Additionally, the faulty protein also blocks the function of the normal protein made from the healthy copy inherited from the other parent.

As a result, ARS enzyme activity in people with one mutant copy is even less than in individuals bearing one normal gene and a second 'null' mutation that produces no protein at all. This explains why people with a missing copy of the gene often remain healthy, while those with the specific neuropathy mutation become ill.

A dominant-negative effect usually involves proteins that function as dimers, i.e. two molecules of the protein have to pair up to work correctly. The neuropathy-associated protein paired with the healthy protein to create a broken duo, thus accounting for the reduced function.

Charging up

When a gene is expressed, its DNA base sequence is first copied into the base sequence of its mRNA molecules. The mRNA is loaded onto cell structures



When a gene is expressed, its DNA base sequence is first copied into the base sequence of its mRNA molecules. MUH SHINDER/UNSPLOSH

called ribosomes, which function as protein-making factories. The base sequence of the mRNA specifies the sequence in which amino acids are joined together to make the encoded protein. Twenty different amino acids are used to build all proteins.

Another RNA, called tRNA, delivers the amino acids to the ribosomes. Each tRNA attaches to a specific amino acid. tRNA molecules attached to their matching amino acids are said to be 'charged'. Sets of three bases in the mRNA (codons) pair with their corresponding bases in the tRNA (anti-codons).

Correct codon-anticodon pairing ensures that the correct amino acid is added in the correct sequence to the growing protein.

This 'charging' of the correct amino acid is done based on the tRNA's anti-codon and performed by the ARS specific to that amino acid. In humans, the amino acids alanine and asparagine are attached to their corresponding tRNAs by ARSs encoded by the *AARS1* and *NARS1* genes, respectively.

Playing with yeast

The dominant-negative effect of neuropathy-associated *AARS1* and *NARS1* mutations was uncovered using budding yeast (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*). Genetics experiments are easier to do in yeast than in humans, other animals, or in cells derived from them.

First, the scientists engineered the yeast cells to shut off their own native *Ala-ARS* or *Asp-ARS* gene when an

Researchers found that disease-causing mutations had the dominant-negative property, meaning the faulty protein created by the mutations doesn't just stop working, it actively interferes with the healthy version

antibiotic was added to the growth medium. Next, they inserted human *AARS1* or *NARS1* DNA sequences into the cells via two delivery vehicles in parallel. One vehicle was a chromosome-like DNA containing the normal *AARS1* or *NARS1* gene. The other vehicle was an extra-chromosomal DNA that carried either the healthy *AARS1* or *NARS1* gene or one of their mutant versions.

The mutants were neuropathy mutations as well as 'null' mutations (which produce no protein and are not expected to interfere with healthy ones) from patients with IPN.

All the engineered yeast cells grew equally well in normal growth medium containing the sugar glucose. This showed that the cells were not adversely affected by the mere presence of the human DNA sequences. The differences only became evident when the researchers added the antibiotic to the medium to turn off the yeast's own ARS gene, and another sugar to express its extra-chromosomal human counterpart.

Cells containing only a human 'null' mutation did not grow. This suggested

that a functional *Ala-ARS* or *Asp-ARS* gene is essential for growth. In contrast, cells with one healthy human gene and one human 'null' mutant grew robustly, meaning the healthy human gene could do the job alone and that the 'null' version did not get in its way.

However, cells containing one healthy human gene and one neuropathy-associated mutation failed to grow. This showed the neuropathy-associated mutations, unlike the nulls, actively interfered with the healthy version. That is, they had a dominant-negative effect.

Finding treatments

The neuropathy-associated mutant protein traps healthy protein in non-functional pairs, thus reducing functional ARS, decreasing the pool of available amino acids for building proteins, affecting protein synthesis, and ultimately causing disease.

The authors wrote in their paper that long nerves in our limbs, which must maintain protein production far from the cell's main body, may be particularly sensitive to even slight interference from these mutations.

If researchers can find ways to target and block the mRNA or protein made from the dominant-negative gene, it might be possible to treat the IPNs, and the yeast strains developed in these studies could prove useful in this search.

(D.P. Kasbekar is a retired scientist and an independent science writer. kasbekar.dp@yuboo.co.in)

THE GIST

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Only some mutations in the ARS genes result in IPN and others do not

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