



Sanskriti IAS

6th Mar 2026



IMPORTANT

EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

DELHI CENTRE:
636, Mukherjee Nagar
New Delhi-110009

PRAYAGRAJ CENTRE:
1/1/8A, Stanley Rd,
Maharana Pratap Chauraha,
Civil Lines, Prayagraj, UP - 211002

 **9555-124-124**

 **sanskritiias.com**

GS 2 : INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 10

Our stakes are high in West Asia. Delhi must call for diplomacy, de-escalation



THAROORTHINK

BY SHASHI THAROOR

AS THE war ignited by the missiles striking Tehran on February 28 now enters its seventh day, it's clear that it has shattered a fragile regional order and plunged the global economy into a state of high-voltage uncertainty. For India, a country whose energy security and millions of citizens are inextricably linked to the stability of the Gulf, this is not "foreign news". It is a direct threat to our national interests and our aspirations for growth and development.

Analysts have been struggling to discern a coherent logic for this conflict. The tenets of international law don't justify it. The bedrock of the UN Charter is respect for the sovereignty of states and the inviolability of their borders; the use of force is prohibited. There are narrow exceptions for self-defence and Security Council authorisation, yet neither condition has been met. To claim "pre-emptive self-defence" against a nation that was actively engaged in the most promising diplomatic negotiations in a decade is a legal stretch. Compounding this violation is the precisely conducted elimination of the heart of the Iranian leadership, shattering the unwritten but long-respected convention that heads of state and government are never militarily targeted in warfare. By discarding this norm, the US and Israel have not only disregarded convention but risked chaos. "I got him before he got me," President Donald

Trump said of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Any future outcome risks being marinated in blood feuds rather than statesmanship.

The irony of "Epic Fury" is that its proclaimed objective — denying Iran a nuclear weapon — had, according to Omani mediators, already been achieved through ongoing diplomatic negotiations. Just days before the strikes, significant progress had been reported in Geneva, with Iran nearing a deal to abjure nuclear weapons, freeze enrichment and hold zero stockpiles of weapons-grade material, in exchange for structured sanctions relief. By choosing the battlefield over the boardroom, the US and Israel have signalled that diplomacy is a dispensable tool to the overarching goal of regime change.

However, history remains a harsh teacher. Regime change is rarely, if ever, achievable from the air. While modern weaponry may possess the precision to destroy infrastructure, it cannot bomb a new government into existence. Destroying a leadership from the air is one thing, building an alternative in a country of 88 million people quite another. The more likely result is either regime reassertion under new personalities (none of whom seems likely to turn out to be an obliging Iranian version of Venezuela's Dely Rodríguez) or, worse, a failed-state scenario on a massive scale, creating a power vacuum far more dangerous than the regime it sought to replace.

The consequences of this action are already bleeding across borders. Iranian retaliation has not been confined to the primary aggressors; strikes have hit neighbouring countries that were not overtly hostile to Tehran. These actions, going beyond US bases, have caused tragic casualties among the local and foreign residents of those na-

tions, effectively dragging the entire region into a war they did not seek. We now face the worrying prospect of further indiscriminate retaliation by Iran and its proxies against American interests and civilians anywhere in the world. When a regime feels survival is at stake, the distinction between military and civilian targets vanishes.

The economic toll is equally staggering. The closure of regional airspace and the Strait of Hormuz have sent shockwaves through global markets. As a significant portion of the world's seaborne oil passes through this choke point, prices have spiked — one hopes temporarily — from the pre-war \$65 towards \$83 per barrel, and insurance premia are soaring. Qatar has declared force majeure and suspended its gas shipments, affecting factories around the world. Iran currently appears intent on widening the theatre of conflict in order to disrupt the Middle East's civil aviation hubs and stall the movement of oil and gas from the region, calculating that the economic shock, plus the damage wreaked on the "safe haven" reputation of its thriving neighbours, could persuade Washington to rein in the fighting.

Uncomfortable questions persist about the strategic logic of unleashing war. Was this gamble for regime change inspired by a desire to create a unipolar West Asia, integrating Iranian oil into world markets under a more friendly government? Such a theory is plausible, given that the stated reason, nuclear weapons, had already been settled at the negotiating table, and because regime change would achieve a number of broader geostrategic objectives: Reduce Russia's energy leverage over Europe and dilute China's clout in the region by pulling Iran and its energy resources into the West's

Questions persist about the strategic logic of unleashing war. Was this gamble for regime change inspired by a desire to create a unipolar West Asia, integrating Iranian oil into world markets under a more friendly government?

orbit. But the escalation may not unfold as the United States and Israel expect, and the resulting instability is likely to inflict significant damage on every actor involved.

Iran is estimated to have enough ballistic missiles for a couple of weeks of fighting, though half its missile launchers are said to have been destroyed and the remainder are not easy to hide from the "eyes in the sky" of modern technology. How much longer the US and Israel can sustain their barrage is uncertain, but one clue is that President Trump speaks of ending the war in four to five weeks. The threat of American "boots on the ground" seems a bluff, to signal determination rather than real intent. America may accept a solution short of regime change — perhaps a new government willing to seek accommodation — but such a prospect seems highly unlikely in the current climate of escalation. The Iranian regime could survive in a degraded state, prompting an era of proxy attacks, assassinations, terrorism and economic disruption.

For India, the stakes are high. Millions of Indians working in the Gulf now face an uncertain future, while thousands of travellers remain cut off from transit hubs like Dubai, though recent evacuations of stranded passengers have eased the strain. Our domestic priority of affordable oil is undermined, threatening the very growth that fuels our development efforts. India's call for de-escalation and diplomacy is a necessity. Our path to development requires peace and stability in our extended neighbourhood. We must lead the international community in demanding that the missiles flying in all directions stop, before the West Asian abyss grows wide enough to engulf us all.

The writer is MP, Lok Sabha, and chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 10

In sinking of the Dena, a Catch-22 for India



C UDAY
BHASKAR

Was India unaware of such submarine activity in its proximate waters? If yes, this raises further questions on the competence index of India's underwater domain awareness

THE SINKING of the Iranian naval ship IRIS *Dena* by a US submarine in the Indian Ocean off Sri Lanka's coast, in international waters, on March 4, raises awkward and complex political, diplomatic, and military questions for India.

This act of war took place soon after IRIS *Dena* participated in India's International Fleet Review (IFR) at Visakhapatnam in February. This was a major national maritime event graced by the Indian President and has an inherent military symbolism.

Akin to the *ashwamedha yajna* of old, international fleet reviews conducted by major maritime powers are a demonstration of professional naval credibility and an acknowledgement by the regional and global peer group of the host nation's sovereignty and primacy in the proximate maritime domain.

Given that the *Dena* was sunk 40 nautical miles from Sri Lanka, the politico-diplomatic optics are embarrassing for India, to say the least. The related military questions are also complex and discomfiting. The *Dena* was sunk by a US naval nuclear-powered submarine. It is being claimed as the first such "kill" with a torpedo by an American "boat" since World War II.

Delhi will be in a Catch-22 situation over this issue, which raises two questions: One, was India unaware of such submarine activity in its proximate waters? If yes, this raises further questions on the competence index of India's underwater domain awareness.

Two, if India was aware of such activity, was Delhi informed/apprised of the proposed US action when the *Dena* departed Visakhapatnam for Iranian waters? An affirmative answer to both questions could lead to discordant consequences for India, both in the domestic and regional context. Hopefully, more details will emerge in the near future about the sequence of events.

The Sri Lankan government and navy are to be applauded for swift search and rescue and picking up the survivors. The latest reports indicate that the Indian Navy is coordinating with Sri Lanka to support the rescue efforts. This is encouraging and in

keeping with maritime protocols of rescue operations at sea.

The US has justified the torpedo attack as one of targeting an enemy warship in international waters. It will be further justified as there being no mercy in war. However, American compliance with international humanitarian law and the maritime code regarding saving lives at sea is a grey zone when it comes to what happened to the *Dena*. My sense is that this will be debated in professional circles for a long time.

It is nobody's case that an attacking submarine should loiter to pick up survivors. But if the scenario were flipped — had a US platform been in similarly dire straits and there were American survivors at sea to be picked up — what would the Indian and regional response have been? The more critical fallout of the *Dena* sinking is that a regional war, which was geographically limited and confined to air power and missile strikes, has now been expanded to the global maritime domain.

The Indian Ocean region has critical global shipping lanes, including ones for hydrocarbon/energy imports used by all the major Asian economies. India imports almost 88 per cent of its crude oil, which transits these sea lines and is vulnerable to escalation. Wider conflict spillover could disrupt sea lines of communication, raise insurance costs, and trigger rerouting, thereby impacting India's economy and energy security.

India has always been wary of major power conflicts spreading into the South Asian neighbourhood. There is a sense of uneasy déjà vu about Iran. The Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, both in 1979, roiled the region for decades. The probability that the *Dena* is the trigger for something similar cannot be ruled out. A dispassionate discussion in India and with the affected regional nations is warranted. The sinking of the *Dena* should not become a polarising debate in India.

The writer is director, Society for Policy Studies, New Delhi

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 11

Post-war Iran could be more revanchist



MOHAMMED AYOOB

THE BATTLE for Iran's soul has most probably been lost already. Even if all the objectives of the attack on Iran as enumerated by US President Donald Trump are achieved, the endgame in all probability will turn out to be vastly different from that imagined in Washington.

A major objective as articulated by Trump was to decimate the leadership of the Islamic Republic to pave the way for regime change. This has been achieved partially. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as well as several of his trusted lieutenants, have been killed. There is little doubt that the air campaign has the capacity to destroy what little is left of Iran's nuclear production and enrichment capabilities over the next few weeks. Iran's missile and drone stocks are likely to be exhausted and/or destroyed within the next couple of weeks. Tehran's non-state allies such as Hezbollah and Hamas are in such disrepair that they are unlikely to take part significantly in any military campaign in the near future. The Houthis in Yemen are too engaged fighting off their local enemies and too far away to make any difference. Therefore, it is highly likely that Trump and Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu will declare victory in a few weeks.

Where will this leave Iran? There are only two possibilities. First, it could leave Iran in chaos with multiple factions fighting over its carcass, especially since there is no organised opposition group with the effectiveness and legitimacy to take control of the levers of state power and impose its rule over the whole country or at least most of it. Regime change that would bring a pro-American group to power does not appear to be a real possibility.

Second, and the more probable scenario, is that of an Iran rising from the ashes and vowing retribution. There are several good reasons why this will be the outcome.

One, Iran's military and political structure as it currently exists cannot be effectively destroyed by an air campaign alone. It would need hundreds of thousands of American boots on the ground to achieve this goal. This option has never been on the table in Washington.

Two, Iran is not Iraq. It has a long history of statehood and has existed as a uni-

fied entity more or less within its current geographical contours at least since the 16th century with the establishment of the Safavid Empire. It is true that Iran also has minority populations, especially the Azeris, the Kurds and the Baluch. However, the Azeris are well integrated into the Persian core. The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, was an Azeri himself, as were some other leading figures in the government and the opposition. The Tehran bazaar, the principal economic institution in the capital, is dominated by Azeri businessmen. The Kurds and the Baluch have much smaller populations, live in peripheral areas, and are in no position to destabilise the state. Considering these facts, it is clear that the Persian centre will hold.

The questions that then arise are (a) who will control the Iranian centre at the end of the war and (b) will the new rulers of Iran be willing to follow American-Israeli dictates. The successors of the present regime are likely to be hardline military figures. They are likely to survive with the most acute sense of resentment against the humiliation heaped on Iran because they were expected to be the guardians of national dignity and state security. One can almost take it for granted that it would be a revanchist regime.

It would not be difficult for the successor regime to deflect criticism towards the Americans and Israelis because of the suffering inflicted on the Iranian population by America's "war of choice" and the economic travails the people have suffered because of sanctions.

When suffering crosses the boundaries of tolerance, it produces a reaction that often translates into revanchism. Iran is a highly likely candidate for such a reaction. The only beneficiary of this campaign will be Israel because it will make it impossible in the short term for Iran to level the playing field in terms of nuclear weapons capability.

But will an Iran bent on revenge be in America's and the region's interest in the long term? Policymakers in Washington should have pondered over this question very seriously before making the decision to attack Iran with the goal of overthrowing the regime. In the long term, the US and its Arab allies will have to deal with an ultranationalist and revanchist Iran bent on avenging the humiliation inflicted upon it by the air campaign. This is likely to increase the instability already present in strong measure in West Asia, affecting among other things oil and gas supplies to the rest of the world.

The writer is university distinguished professor emeritus of International Relations, Michigan State University

Military success won't bring stability



R SWAMINATHAN

IN HINDSIGHT, the joint attack by the United States and Israel on Iran is not a sudden escalation but the culmination of developments unfolding for nearly a decade, making the conflict inevitable.

In 2015, President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the multilateral agreement designed to ensure that Iran's nuclear programme remained peaceful. At that time, the JCPOA was functioning effectively with extensive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) certifying that Iran was complying with its obligations and that its nuclear activities remained within peaceful limits. Iran was adhering to the enrichment ceiling of 3.67 per cent, maintained its uranium stockpile below 300 kg, and restricted the number and type of centrifuges in operation. Significantly, in 2015, Iran shipped out approximately 11,000 kg of uranium enriched to 20 per cent to Russia.

Trump argued that the JCPOA did not permanently prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and had failed to address Iran's ballistic missile programmes or its regional activities, which Washington characterised as state-sponsored terrorism through proxies such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and others. The US withdrawal and the subsequent re-imposition of sanctions marked a turning point. Iran gradually ceased adhering to its commitments. By June 2025, Iran had enriched approximately 408 kg of uranium to 60 per cent purity, a level far closer to weapons-grade, although all such material remained under IAEA safeguards.

At the same time, Iran's regional position was undergoing significant erosion. Not only did Israel inflict devastating losses on Hamas, it also decimated Hezbollah in Lebanon. The collapse of the Assad regime in Syria in December 2024 deprived Iran of a key strategic ally. Thus, Iran's ability to project power externally was sharply reduced, leaving only the Houthis in Yemen and certain militias in Iraq as instruments of influence. Israel's 12-day war against Iran in June 2025 exposed profound weaknesses in the latter's air defence systems. Israeli strikes penetrated Iran with ease, targeting military infrastructure and missile sites, creating conditions for direct US intervention. In Operation Midnight Hammer, the United States dropped bunker-buster bombs on Iranian nuclear facilities.

This marked the first direct US attack on Iran's territory. For decades, successive US administrations had refrained from such action, despite the hostage crisis in 1979 when dozens of American diplomats were held captive for more than 400 days, the 1983 Beirut bombing that killed 242 American military personnel, and Iran's rhetoric, particularly its repeated chants of "Death to America" and "Death to Israel".

Although Trump declared that Iran's nuclear programme had been obliterated, questions persisted regarding the whereabouts of the country's stockpile of uranium and Israel's concern over its remaining missile capability, about 40 per cent of which was said to have been destroyed during the 12-day war. Washington began its coercive diplomacy, deploying substantial military assets close to Iran and broadening negotiations to include missile restrictions, despite the clear understanding that Iran would never willingly surrender what it viewed as its primary deterrent against Israeli attack. The significant concessions offered by Iran had no impact, and war became inevitable. Although regime change has been articulated as a US objective, its feasibility remains doubtful. Iran's political system is deeply institutionalised, and without American ground forces, an option Trump has not exercised so far, the regime is likely to survive. Mojtaba Khamenei, the 56-year-old son of the late Ayatollah Khamenei, is emerging as the frontrunner to become the Supreme Leader.

The human and material toll for the US has not been substantial so far. Six US military personnel have been killed. Iran has launched numerous missiles and drones against Israel and US positions, but most have been intercepted. The rate of Iranian missile launches is declining. Israeli civilian casualties remain limited, with approximately 10 deaths, while six fatalities have been reported in Gulf countries.

In contrast, destruction within Iran has been extensive. More than 800 people have been killed, over 2,000 military targets have been struck, 17 Iranian naval vessels have been sunk, including a warship in international waters off Sri Lanka. Analysts estimate that 5-0 per cent of Iran's missile launchers have been destroyed. Will Iran attacking its Gulf neighbours result in the normalisation of their relations with Israel and the further expansion of the Trump-sponsored Abraham Accords? Past interventions in Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan offer sobering reminders that military success does not translate into lasting political stability. The hope is that good sense will prevail to end the hostilities soon.

The writer is former governor of India to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Vienna, and former ambassador to Egypt

GS 3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 11



RAHUL NIGAM

ACROSS CAMPUSES today, the message to students is unmistakable: Learn AI or risk being left behind. Yet, the question remains: For how long will today's tools be tomorrow's advantage? The frameworks students master in their first year often look different by the time they graduate. Programming environments evolve, libraries are rewritten, and entire platforms disappear. In a world where AI systems can generate code, design architectures, and optimise complex workflows with minimal oversight, the shelf life of narrowly technical training is shrinking.

Aligning education with emerging technologies is both sensible and necessary. The difficulty begins when responsiveness to

In AI era, teach science, not tools

market demand displaces foundational learning. A curriculum shaped primarily by employability can produce graduates whose expertise is bound to current platforms rather than durable intellectual frameworks.

What endures across technological cycles is the ability to reason from fundamentals. Scientific training develops the discipline to identify assumptions, trace causality, test limits, distinguish correlation from mechanism, and ask whether an answer is plausible. As automation expands, the premium shifts from implementation to judgement. And judgement is formed over years of grappling not only with equations but also with the constraints those equations must respect.

Technological success today is often narrated in terms of software breakthroughs and algorithmic advances. Yet, ven fields that appear purely computational remain shaped by physical limits. Nations that lead

in AI today built their capabilities on sustained investment in fundamental research long before AI became commercially fashionable. Technological dominance has rarely been the outcome of short-term skill training alone. The current AI surge stands on foundations laid in laboratories that valued curiosity as much as application.

This global pattern also has local implications. For many years, the Indian IT story was built on becoming the world's execution engine. That model created large-scale employment and strengthened the middle class. Yet, it was also heavily dependent on routine and process-driven work, and routine is what AI is beginning to absorb efficiently. If universities continue producing engineers trained mainly to operate existing platforms, they risk tying student futures to a shrinking segment of the value chain. The next phase of growth will not come from

using tools more efficiently but from designing new ones, which would require moving from execution to invention.

The central question around education, then, is which intellectual foundation remains reliable across decades of technological upheaval. Mastery of current tools may open the first door, but mastery of principles determines how many doors remain open thereafter.

The argument is not against modern skills but against reducing education to transient technical proficiency. Technologies will continue to evolve at an accelerating speed. The laws governing energy, matter, stability, and causality will not. An education grounded in those enduring principles prepares students for repeated reinvention in a world where change is the only constant.

The writer is associate professor at BITS Pilani

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

GS 3: INDIAN ECONOMY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 13

TRUMP HAS ASSURED POLITICAL RISK INSURANCE TO VESSELS TRANSITING STRAIT OF HORMUZ

India in talks with US on risk insurance to energy cargoes

Sukalp Sharma
New Delhi, March 5

THE GOVERNMENT is in talks with the United States on political risk insurance and guarantees that President Donald Trump promised to merchant vessels, particularly energy cargoes, transiting the Strait of Hormuz where vessel traffic has come to a standstill amid the ongoing conflict in West Asia, a senior government official said Thursday.

Cargo movement through the Strait of Hormuz — a critical chokepoint for global energy flows — effectively came to a halt after Iran warned of attacks on ships, with most insurers and vessels avoiding getting involved in the prevailing extremely high-risk environment. A bulk of India's oil and gas supplies pass through the Strait of Hormuz — the narrow waterway between Iran and Oman that connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

In recent months, roughly 2.5-2.7 million barrels per day (bpd) of India's crude imports — accounting for around half of the country's total oil imports — have transited the Strait, mainly from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait. The longer-term average is around 40%.

India is the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil with an import dependency level of over 88%.

The country depends on liquefied natural gas (LNG) to meet roughly half of its natural gas needs, and around half of India's LNG imports come through Hormuz. As for LPG, the bulk of India's demand is met through imports, and over 80% of these volumes come via the narrow waterway.

In all, approximately one-fifth of global liquid petroleum consumption and global LNG



A bulk of India's oil and gas supplies passes through the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway on which cargo movement has now come to a standstill after attack on Iran. REUTERS

trade flows through the waterway. "We are trying to understand the American proposal... it would require them to have a corpus of several hundred million dollars to make such a plan work. But the good thing is that people are talking to each other on this issue," said a senior government official, who did not wish to be identified.

"Effective IMMEDIATELY, I have ordered the United States Development Finance Corporation (DFC) to provide, at a very reasonable price, political risk insurance and guarantees for the Financial Security of ALL Maritime Trade, especially Energy, traveling through the Gulf. This will be available to all Shipping Lines.

"If necessary, the United States Navy will begin escorting tankers through the Strait of Hormuz, as soon as possible. No matter what, the United States will ensure the FREE FLOW OF ENERGY to the WORLD. The United States' ECONOMIC and MILITARY

MIGHT is the GREATEST ON EARTH — More actions to come," Trump recently posted on Truth Social. Following Trump's announcement, the DFC said that it was ready to mobilise its political risk insurance and guarantee products to "stabilise international commerce and support American and allied businesses operating in the Middle East during this period of conflict with the Iranian regime".

In a press release, the DFC said, "Acting under the strategic guidance of President Trump and Secretary (Scott) Bessent, DFC is closely monitoring how certain sectors — maritime trade and energy in particular — are being impacted by the current conflict in the Middle East and the Iranian regime's actions.

DFC will offer support to commercial shipping charterers, shipowners, and key maritime insurance providers to minimise market disruptions and help ensure the

free flow of goods and capital."

According to sources in the know, the government and Indian oil and gas companies are in contact with all international suppliers, including national oil companies and even large traders like Vitol, Trafigura, and ADNOC Trading, to source additional volumes of crude oil and LPG from their international portfolios in view of the West Asia conflict, even as the country is in a "comfortable" position to prevent any near-term supply shortage when it comes to major fuels like petrol, diesel, and LPG.

They assured that India is in a comfortable position with regard to oil and fuel stocks, and there was no need at present to ration fuels.

They also ruled out any increase in retail fuel prices for the time being. While India is currently estimated to have crude oil and fuel stocks for at least six to eight weeks, the country's cushion is thinner when it comes to LNG as addi-

tional LNG stockpiling is significantly more challenging than crude oil and petroleum fuels.

India, the world's fourth-largest LNG importer, is actively scouting for additional LNG cargoes from other source markets. Some concern is already visible in the natural gas sector due to the West Asia conflict.

India's largest LNG importer Petronet LNG has issued force majeure notices to its key supplier QatarEnergy, and its off-takers in India. Moreover, QatarEnergy has also issued a notice indicating a potential force majeure due to the conflict, which has forced the LNG producer to halt production.

Natural gas supplies to some sectors in India have already been reduced in the anticipation of tighter LNG deliveries. Government sources indicated that if the situation worsens, reprioritisation of sectoral gas allocation may be undertaken to ensure that the critical sectors don't suffer for want of fuel. Some sectors can also switch to alternative fuels, they said. Domestic natural gas is allocated to various sectors — like city gas distribution, fertilisers, and power — based on a priority list.

Petronet LNG has long-term contracts to buy 8.5 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) of Qatari LNG.

It also buys additional LNG volumes from Qatar from the spot market. Other Indian oil and gas companies also buy LNG from the UAE. In all, India imports around 27 mtpa of LNG from various geographies.

Sources said India consumes around 195 million standard cubic metres per day (mscmd) of natural gas, half of which comes in the form of imported LNG, and 60 mscmd is currently not available due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the force majeure in place.

GS 2: SOCIAL ISSUES

THE HINDU PAGE: 8

Protecting women's rights amid conflict and instability

International Women's Day is once again in our midst. Observed globally on March 8, the day has evolved from its early 20th century labour roots into a leading platform for deliberating on women's rights, celebrating achievements and demanding concrete action toward gender equality. Officially recognized by the United Nations (UN) in 1977, the day continues to serve as both a celebration and a call to action.

Rights, justice and action

For 2026, the UN has chosen "Rights, Justice, Action: For All Women and Girls" as the global theme for International Women's Day. While these words resonate powerfully, affirming women's rights to equality and justice, the reality remains far from supportive of translating this theme into a practical programme. The unpleasant truth is that this ambitious call for action is against the ominous backdrop of a world marked by conflict, displacement, economic instability and political uncertainty. Multiple wars and conflicts are raging in several parts of the world.

Relentless targeted attacks by warring nations have already claimed so many lives and caused the destruction of several strategic locations.

Those killed include a large number of women and children. What is worse, instead of de-escalation, we are witnessing a hardening of positions on all sides, with no early cessation of hostilities in sight.

What do these conflicts portend for living conditions and rights of women and children?

Gender equality is not a privilege but a fundamental human right. But it is easier said than done, more so in a world facing multiple crises in which women and children are the most vulnerable. Research and field studies have clearly established that women and girls suffer disproportionately in wars. Conflict and



Archana Ramasundaram

retired from the Indian Police Service as a Director General of the Sashastra Seema Bal, a central armed police force. She has also served as Member, Lokpal of India

Global instability makes this year's International Women's Day theme urgent

insecurity dramatically escalate incidents of gender-based violence, food insecurity, restricted mobility or forced displacement, disruption of families, loss of livelihood, breakdown of social support systems and lack of access to health care and education. Women trapped in conflict zones are also targeted as a strategy of war. Rape and sexual violence against women have been committed during wars since ancient times to subjugate and humiliate the enemy.

Many women also suffer mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. The side-lining of women in peace talks and reconstruction processes further reduces their chances of addressing these problems.

Promises but no progress

Acknowledging the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the UN Security Council, on October 31, 2000, unanimously adopted the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. It was affirmed in

this historic resolution that women must be protected during conflicts and included actively in peacebuilding processes. Yet, the gap between commitments and implementation continues to remain wide. While a few countries have developed national action plans to implement Resolution 1325, no tangible change is noticed on the ground.

In fact, the conditions for women and children have worsened over these decades. Inequalities have become more acute in many places, with wars and political instability further weakening the institutions for the protection of women. The UN Secretary-General Report on Women, Peace and Security for 2025 categorically states that the world is experiencing the highest number of

active conflicts since 1946, resulting in unprecedented risks and suffering for women and girls. The report adds that nearly 676 million women live within 50 kilometres of deadly conflicts, the highest level since the 1990s. Civilian casualties among women and children quadrupled when compared to the previous two-year period. Conflict-related sexual violence increased by 87% in two years.

Moreover, despite overwhelming evidence that women's participation makes peace more durable, they remain largely excluded from decision-making. In 2024, nine out of 10 peace processes had no women negotiators, with

women making up just 7% of negotiators and 14% of mediators globally. This is despite the research consistently showing that peace agreements are more durable when women are meaningfully involved in these processes.



INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY

Rights require action

Women, being important stakeholders as well as victims of war, should be given equal opportunity to participate in talks and other processes. Women's collectives and global bodies should also play a more action-oriented role instead of confining themselves to slogans and conferences. Women and children in conflict zones should be protected from violence and sexual exploitation. In fact, helping them with food, education, health care, financial assistance and also emotional support is the duty of other stakeholders as well.

This underscores why the 2026 emphasis on rights and justice is both urgent and essential, making International Women's Day more than a calendar date and a reminder that protecting women's rights amid conflict and instability is a collective responsibility.