



Sanskriti IAS

27th Mar 2026



IMPORTANT

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GS 3: ENVIRONMENT

THE INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 4

• CLIMATE

India's new climate targets are modest but significant



AMITABH SINHA

INDIA ON Wednesday revealed its climate targets for 2035, promising to make further progress on cutting the carbon intensity of its economy, expanding the deployment of renewable energy and creating carbon sinks from forests and trees.

India said it would ensure that at least 60% of its electricity installed capacity in 2035 was based on non-fossil fuel sources, up from the 50% target it had set for 2030. It has promised to attain at least a 47% reduction in emissions intensity, or emissions per unit of GDP, on 2005 levels, which is two percentage points more than its current target of 45% for 2030. And, it has promised to create a carbon sink that is at least 3.5 to 4 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalent larger than what existed in 2005.

Each of the new targets marks a progression over existing commitments for 2030, a mandatory requirement under the 2015 Paris Agreement. Under this 2015 pact, every country is obligated to decide upon, and implement, a set of climate actions that help the global fight against climate change. These are referred to as nationally-determined contributions, or NDCs — emphasising the fact that countries themselves decide the nature and scale of climate actions.

The signals from India

On the face of it, India's new climate targets seem to be only a slight enhancement over its existing 2030 commitments, which it is on course to achieve well ahead of time. The renewable energy target has already been met and the other two might also be close to being achieved once fresh data on those indicators are available.

However, India's reaffirmation of the clean energy pathway it has chosen for itself is extremely important in the current global situation in which countries are being forced to reevaluate their policy options regarding energy, economy and security.

The chain of events triggered by Donald Trump's re-election as President of the US



• Small steps

India's third set of nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) makes small upgrades to the last one

	NDC-1	NDC-2	NDC-3	PROGRESS
Year of announcement	2015	2022	2026	
Target year	2030	2030	2035	
Goal 1: Reducing emissions intensity (emissions per unit GDP)	33-35% from 2005 levels	45% from 2005 levels	47% from 2005 levels	36% reduction achieved by 2020
Goal 2: Share of non-fossil electricity sources	40%	50%	60%	52% in February 2026
Goal 3: Creating additional carbon sinks (forests, trees)	2.5 to 3 bn tonnes over 2005 stock	2.5 to 3 bn tonnes over 2005 stock	3.5 to 4 bn tonnes over 2005 stock	2.3 bn tonnes created by 2021

has resulted in a serious erosion in global efforts on climate change. These events have not just slowed down progress on climate, but threaten to reverse the momentum that was building on the replacement of fossil fuels with renewable energy.

The US under Trump has abandoned renewables and is reinvesting money and efforts towards developing and controlling oil and gas resources.

Such a reversal by the world's second largest producer and consumer of energy has had major consequences. Washington's pursuit of greater control over the world's oil and gas resources, as reflected in its actions in Venezuela, and the war in West Asia have unnerved several countries, forcing them to make renewed attempts to secure their own oil and gas supply chains.

In this backdrop, India, the world's third biggest emitter and the third largest consumer of energy, has signalled that it remains committed to the clean energy pathway and enhanced climate action.

Finding the money

India and other developing nations have said inadequate financing would compel them to scale down their climate actions

Finding low-cost, long-term finance for green investments is a key objective in India's 2035 climate plan

UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Simon Stiell acknowledged the significance of India's new climate targets.

"The signals in this announcement from one of the world's largest and fastest-growing economies could not be more crucial, at a time when the soaring costs of dependence on volatile fossil fuels are becoming painfully clear, undermining national security and sovereignty around the world, driving up prices, and leaving people short of food and fuel. By contrast, renewable energy is not at the mercy of narrow shipping straits or huge naval escorts," he said, referring to the US-Israeli war on Iran that has led to the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz. The UN official said that India's new climate plan would deepen its economic advantage.

Disappointment with international finance

Considering the progress it has already made on its existing commitments, India, perhaps, was in a position to make bigger

As the US retreats from renewables and climate financing hopes falter, India has signalled that it remains committed to clean energy pathway

enhancements to its 2035 targets.

For example, a recently released document by the Central Electricity Authority projected that the share of non-fossil fuel sources in the electricity generation capacity could go from the current 52% to 70% by 2035. India, however, has set a target of only 60% in its NDC for 2035. This shows that the country would be willing to do more only whenever it can, and not want to be constrained by international commitments that have to be made in advance.

One of the reasons for India not aiming higher in its 2035 targets, despite seemingly being in a position to do so, could have something to do with its disappointment over the failure of the developed countries to make more money available for climate action.

India has been extremely unhappy with the outcome of the climate finance negotiations in Baku in 2024, where the developed countries only agreed to raise about \$300 billion a year for the developing countries, and only from 2035. The developing countries had been demanding that at least \$1.3 trillion a year be made available for them to finance their climate actions.

India has been consistently highlighting this issue at international forums. At the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Brazil last year, it managed to force through a decision on the creation of a two-year work programme to discuss all climate finance issues.

India has also been arguing that the lack of adequate money would compel countries such as itself to scale down the ambition of their climate actions. In fact, an Indian official had told *The Indian Express* that India's 2035 climate targets would very likely "reflect the disappointment of the climate finance outcome at COP29 in Baku".

As a result, finding low-cost, long-term finance — both from domestic as well as international sources — for green investments has been identified as one of the core objectives in India's 2035 climate plan.

With the relatively modest upgrade in targets, India also seems to be reiterating its position that while it remains fully committed to climate action, it would not allow international pressure to dictate the pace of those actions. India's 2035 NDC, which is yet to be published and submitted to UN Climate Change, is expected to have a strong emphasis on adaptation actions.

GS 3: INDIAN ECONOMY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 4

• PERSONAL FINANCE

New I-T Rules: Simpler processes, higher deductions for the salaried

Aanchal Magazine
New Delhi, March 26

WITH THE new Income-tax Act, 2025 set to be enforced from April 1, the Central Board of Direct Taxes has released the new Income-tax Rules, 2026. A series of changes has been introduced in the forms, disclosures and deductions for salaried employees, with some experts pointing out that the old tax regime could entail more incentives for middle-income salary earners vis-à-vis the new regime. There has also been a substantial reduction in text and forms to ease compliance.

Higher thresholds for quoting PAN

The thresholds for mandatory quoting of Permanent Account Number have been hiked for certain transactions, including:

- Cash deposits or withdrawals aggregating to Rs 10 lakh or more in a financial year, in one or more accounts of a person, as against the current requirement for deposits exceeding Rs 50,000 in one day with a banking company/co-operative bank.
- Purchasing motor vehicles priced above Rs 5 lakh. So far, PAN has been required for the sale/purchase of a motorve-

hicle or a vehicle other than two-wheelers.

- Purchase or sale/gift/joint development agreement of any immovable property, if the transaction cost is over Rs 20 lakh, double the existing limit.

For individuals, salaried employees

For individuals, a single unified challan-cum-statement will replace separate forms for Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) on property, rent, contractors and crypto assets, with filing to be done using PAN rather than TAN (Tax Deduction and Collection Account Number).

TDS needs to be deducted on rent payment of Rs 50,000 per month, transfer of immovable property of Rs 50 lakh or more, on professional or contract or commission brokerage payments of Rs 50 lakh and transfer of virtual digital assets.

For salaried employees, Form 130 will replace Form 16 to provide a detailed summary to an employee or pensioner about the salary, tax deducted and deductions. Fringe benefits/amenities/profits in lieu of salary provided by employers to employees will be part of Form 123, to be digitally linked to Form 130. Tax exemption has been provided for "free food and non-alco-

Old vs new tax regime

- For people in lower and lower-middle income brackets, the new tax regime's simplified structure may reduce tax liability while minimising compliance burden.
- For higher middle and higher-income taxpayers who actively plan their finances, the old regime may provide opportunities to optimise taxes with deductions and exemptions, experts said.

holic beverages" provided by employers at offices or "through paid vouchers usable only at eating joints", costing under Rs 200 per meal. This provision is for both old and new tax regimes — the exclusionary provision for the new tax regime has been done away with. Children's education allowance and hostel expenditure allowance have also been raised.

The expansion of a higher 50% House Rent Allowance (HRA) to Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune and Ahmedabad brings them at par with Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, and Chennai. However, such benefits will face greater scrutiny with evidence required in a separate form (Form 124) at the time of computation of income and TDS.

Further, the reporting threshold for Statement of Financial Transactions — mandated for entities like banks and companies to report high-value transactions of individuals — for receipt of insurance premium payments has been lowered from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 5 lakh where PAN is available, and from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 2.5 lakh where it isn't.

Varied benefits in both regimes

For people in lower and lower-middle income brackets, the new tax regime's simplified structure may reduce tax liability

while minimising compliance burden. But for those in higher brackets, who actively plan their finances, the old regime may provide opportunities to optimise taxes with deductions and exemptions, experts said.

For taxpayers earning up to Rs 15 lakh, the new regime's lower slab rates, higher standard deduction, and simplified structure generally make it more attractive, said Rahul Charkha, Partner, Economic Laws Practice.

For middle-income taxpayers in the Rs 15-25 lakh range, the choice becomes nuanced: those with modest deductions often find the new regime more efficient, while those who receive substantial HRA, have home loans, and fully utilise Sections 80C, 80CCD(1B), and other deductions may find the old regime equally or more beneficial. For taxpayers in the Rs 25-50 lakh bracket, regime selection increasingly depends on the scale of deductions and exemptions claimed. High-deduction profiles may still extract significant value under the old regime," he said.

Tax experts also pointed out the rushed timeline to comply with the new I-T rules. Even though the filings for income earned in 2026-27 will be filed in 2027-28, some provisions, such as TDS and advance tax, will kickstart based on these new rules.

GS 3: INDIAN ECONOMY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 4

• ECONOMY

As war drags on, RBI may have to choose between forex reserves and rupee value

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, March 26

THIS week, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said India's foreign exchange (forex) reserves "remain adequate to provide cushion against external shocks". The central bank's assurances are crucial. So far in March, a net \$12.1 billion in Indian shares have been sold by foreign investors, the highest monthly figure ever. This has dragged the rupee down to a new low almost every other day. At their current levels — \$710 billion as on March 13 — the forex reserves are not far from the record of \$728 billion that was hit at the end of February. However, this figure requires a lot of unpacking.

Components of forex reserves

India's forex reserves have four components: foreign currency (FX) assets, gold, Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), and the Reserve Tranche Position with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

SDRs are a buffer of sorts for IMF members, who can exchange it for currency when they are in trouble. The value

of SDRs is based on a basket of five currencies — the US dollar, the euro, the Chinese renminbi, the Japanese yen, and the pound sterling. As of March 13, India's SDR holdings were worth \$18.7 billion. The reserve tranche position with the IMF is akin to an emergency line of credit. India's reserve position is worth \$4.8 billion.

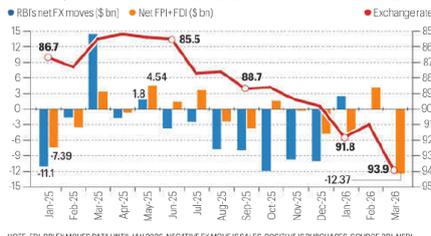
As such, the real help in India's forex reserves only comes from holdings of FX assets (\$56 billion) and gold (\$121 billion). However, selling gold for the RBI is a last resort — it did so during the Balance of Payments (BoP) crisis of 1991. The central bank cannot sell its gold on a day-to-day basis to defend the rupee. As such, FX assets are the realistic measure of the RBI's ability to defend the rupee on a continued basis. However, even that figure requires adjustments.

Dual rupee defence

The RBI can stop the rupee from falling in two ways. The first involves the central bank selling FX in the 'spot' market. This reduces the forex reserves immediately and helps the currency strengthen or not weaken further. But defending the rupee

Outflows drag rupee down despite RBI's defence

Amid foreign outflows, RBI has had to step up forex sales to shore up the rupee.



NOTE: FDI, FPI, RBI FX MOVES DATA UNTIL JAN 2026; NEGATIVE FX MOVE IS SALES, POSITIVE IS PURCHASES. SOURCE: RBI, NSDL

this way has an impact on the domestic financial system. When the RBI sells FX, it gets rupees in return. This reduces rupee

availability, or liquidity, in the Indian financial system and drives up interest rates. This is why the central bank also sells FX

in the 'forward' market. It gets the desired result — the rupee is defended — but not the undesirable indirect impact on interest rates. How? Because the RBI doesn't have to immediately deliver the FX, but at a future date, rupee liquidity is not tightened.

As per latest data for the end of January, the RBI had net sold \$68 billion of FX in forwards. This figure has likely increased in the last two months considering the rupee has been under severe pressure in March. However, the RBI's FX assets must be adjusted for these forward sales. Even if one conservatively assumes the figure to have remained at \$68 billion, the FX assets number reduces to under \$600 billion.

"The RBI may need to keep an eye on net FX adequacy," HSBC said this week, adding that the number of months of goods imports that reserves can cover is approaching 2013 levels — "when India was last under BoP stress".

Preserve reserves or rupee?

According to Bernstein analysts, the RBI's defence of the rupee "will not help" at a time when global conditions are work-

ing against it and foreign investors are pulling money aggressively. Since October 2024, when markets began expecting Donald Trump to return to the White House for a second term, and until January this year, the RBI net sold \$94 billion of FX in the spot market. And yet, the rupee has fallen from 84-per-dollar to almost 94.

"Hence, in the event these hostilities persist, we think it is only a matter of time before 97-98 levels for the rupee are breached," Bernstein analysts added.

Former RBI governor Shaktikanta Das often said forex reserves is the umbrella that must be used on a rainy day. But at what point does the umbrella fail to stop India from getting drenched? According to economists, if the West Asia war continues, the RBI will have "no choice but to let the currency depreciate".

The longer the war goes on, the longer energy prices will stay elevated. This will increase India's import bill. At a time when foreign investors are pulling money out of India, a higher import bill will mean an even greater outflow of FX from India — which will put more pressure on the rupee.

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE HINDU PAGE : 1

Iran grants India, 4 others Hormuz passage

Ships from India, China, Russia, Iraq, and Pak. can pass through the Strait, says Iran Foreign Minister

Minister thanks India, Sri Lanka for transferring naval ships facing U.S. threat to a safe location

President Trump has said Iran should 'get serious before it's too late, after that there's no way back'

Stanly Johay

India and four other "friendly nations" were allowed to move their ships through the Strait of Hormuz, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said, adding that Tehran has established its "sovereignty" over the waterway connecting the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

He also thanked India and Sri Lanka for their "significant help" after an Iranian vessel, *IRIS Dena*, was sunk in a U.S. attack in the Indian Ocean during the conflict and said no talks were being held with Washington.

"We permitted passage through the Strait of Hormuz for friendly nations including China, Russia, India, Iraq, and Pakistan," Mr. Araghchi said in an interview with the Iran News Network that was broadcast on Wednesday night.

"The Strait of Hormuz is located in the territorial waters of Iran and Oman, and Iran's sovereignty is established there. After the war, we will also have new arrangements for passing through the Strait," he said.

"In the incident of the *Dena* ship, which was unfairly attacked without any warning, I must thank Sri Lanka and India for their significant help in transferring two other ships to a safe location," he added.

The Iranian frigate was attacked and sunk by a U.S. Navy submarine on March 4 off the coast of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean while returning from exercises in Visakhapatnam. At least 87 sailors were killed in the attack.

IRIS Lavan and *IRIS Bushehr*, which also came to the region to take part in the drills, have now docked in Kochi and Sri Lanka's Trincomalee, respectively.



The tanker Apollo Ocean unloads cargo collected from the vessel Shivolik in Mangaluru on Thursday. Shivolik is one of four Indian ships which crossed the Strait of Hormuz recently. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Strait of Hormuz, through which more than a hundred ships passed daily before the war, has seen traffic plunge to single digits since the conflict began.

At least four India-flagged ships — *Jag Vasant*, *Pine Gas*, *Shivolik*, and *Nanda Devi* — have transited the strait since the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Iran on February 28.

Mr. Araghchi, who was Iran's chief negotiator with the U.S. before the war, also said no talks were being held with the U.S.

"I state firmly that there has been no negotiation with the U.S. However, in recent days, the American side has begun sending various messages through different intermediaries, and we have responded by stating our positions. It is simply an exchange of

India eyes local currency trade for West Asian oil

T.C.A. Sharad Eaghavan
NEW DELHI

The Centre is "experimenting with conducting trade with the West Asian countries in local currencies, in a bid to mitigate the fiscal double-hit of surging oil prices and a depreciating rupee, according to two senior officials in the government.

Another objective is to messages through friends," he said.

"At present, our position is to continue resisting, continue defending our country. We have no intention of negotiating."

save on currency conversion costs.

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

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U.S. President Donald Trump, who "postponed" on Monday a threatened strike on Iran's power infrastructure, has said Washington is in talks with Tehran. Pakistan's Deputy

Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said "indirect talks" between the two sides are taking place through messages being relayed by Pakistan.

"The U.S. has shared 15 points, being deliberated upon by Iran. Brothery countries of Turkey and Egypt, among others, are also extending their support to this initiative," Mr. Dar wrote in a social media post.

Mr. Trump on Thursday said Iran should "better get serious soon" in talks, "before it's too late, because once that happens, there is no turning back". U.S. media have reported that the Pentagon is sending more troops to West Asia in preparation for a possible ground offensive against Iran.

AT AN IMPASSE
» PAGE 14

India has oil for 60 days, LPG supplies for one month: govt.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

In a bid to end speculation about India's energy stocks amid the escalating tensions in West Asia, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) on Thursday said that India has so far arranged a month of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) supplies through imports, with constant additional procurement ongoing.

A statement said that India has reduced its reliance on imports for LPG, with the country producing "much more" than it needs to import.

On crude oil, the government said Indian oil companies have secured supplies that would suffice for the next 60 days, while the country already holds stocks enough for 60 days.

These 60 days of current stocks, which include crude, diesel and petrol, are an increase over the 50 days of total stocks the government had said it had at the start of the war.

Cumulatively, India currently has a total reserve (storage) capacity of 74 days of fuel stocks, including crude oil, petrol, and diesel.

'Local production up'

"Nearly two months of steady supply is available for every Indian citizen regardless of what happens globally," the Ministry said. "Next two months of crude procurement has also been secured. India is completely secure for the next many months and the quantity in strategic cavern storage becomes secondary in such a

'Cargo charge waiver draws more tankers'

MANGALURU With the New Mangalore Port Authority (NMPA) waiving cargo charges for liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and crude oil tankers to attract vessels for tiding over geopolitical crisis in West Asia, more vessels are sailing into the port. » PAGE 12

supply situation."

While emphasising that there is no LPG shortage in the country, the government said that India was now producing more LPG than it needs to import. It said that, since the LPG control order issued earlier, domestic refinery production has been ramped up by 40%. This, it said, has brought the daily output to 50,000 tonnes, which is more than 60% of domestic requirements.

Additionally, with respect to imports, the government said that 8,00,000 tonnes of LPG cargoes are en route to India from the United States, Russia, Australia, and other countries.

"Approximately one full month of supply is firmly arranged, with additional procurement being finalised continuously," it stated.

Earlier in the day, Vikas Kaushal, managing director at state-owned Hindustan Petroleum said, "Over the past two days, sales have increased by more than 15% on an all-India basis... our supply chains remain strong, our outlets are fully stocked."

GS 2: SOCIAL ISSUES

THE HINDU PAGE : 9

Should men get paternity leave in India?



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

PARLEY

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

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

Why does paternity leave matter? Who would it benefit?

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

SANJOY GHOSE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AD: 90% of India's workers work in enterprises that employ between one and 10 workers. Factories with more than 100 workers are 0.5% of total enterprises, so we are talking about an industrial structure where the average number of employees per firm is very small. If you think of a nano firm with three people, and if one of them is on parental leave, you have to also think of how that enterprise is going to function. So, I think increasing the size of enterprises is an absolute precondition for parental, caregiving, menstrual, or any other kind of leave.

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

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



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

GS 3: ECONOMY

THE HINDU PAGE : 13

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

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

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
SEOUL/BEIJING

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

No supply
"The issue isn't the price - if supply itself isn't available, then without containers, you simply can't sell the product," a company official told Reuters, declining to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

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

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

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

heat the fry the snacks.

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

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

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

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

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

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