

Iran conflict escalates; India must respond appropriately

If there is one region that is perennially in turmoil, it is the Middle East. A cocktail of factors—religious conflicts, disputes between superpowers, and, of course, oil—keeps it in the news all the time. After a full of a few weeks, with Washington focusing on economic strangulation rather than kinetic action, the region has heated up again, as the US military struck five Iranian oil tankers on Tuesday. This happened, according to the US Central Command (CENTCOM), “after the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) targeted a US Navy warship with ballistic missiles twice over the past two days.” The US warship successfully evaded the attempted Iranian attacks and continued to patrol regional waters. No American personnel were harmed, it added.

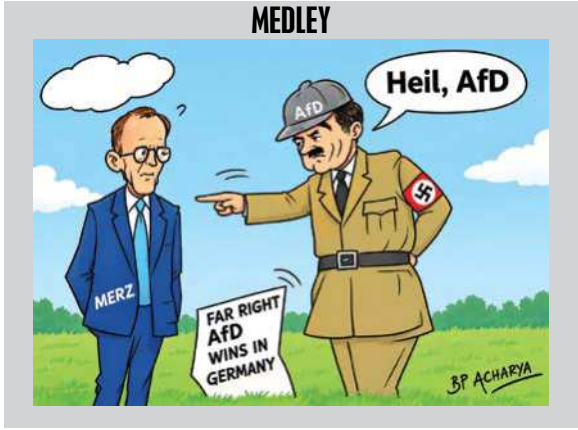
There is also a report of Iran firing about 20 ballistic missiles towards Jordan, targeting two US military bases. Meanwhile, the pro-Tehran Houthis in Yemen have also launched ballistic missiles toward Israel. They also launched a wave of attacks on Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, wounding over 70 people and igniting fires at oil facilities and utilities in the kingdom.

Tensions seem to be escalating. It looks like conflict will stay that way for some time. The reason is that US President Donald Trump is unwilling to fight the war all-out, with American troops on the ground. This is in tune with his opposition to the ‘forever wars’ that the US has fought many a time. His core base, the MAGA crowd,

hates America’s wars in faraway lands, gobbling up resources and killing young soldiers. Besides, his party, the Republican Party, must face midterm elections soon. At the same time, Trump doesn’t want to let Iran off the hook. Hence the blow-hot-and-cold nature of the ongoing war in the Middle East.

The escalation has affected crude prices, which hit a six-week high. Brent futures are touching the \$100 mark. Owing to our heavy dependence on crude imports, the government has changed the composition of its top five suppliers, with Brazil and Venezuela replacing the US and Nigeria. Russia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) stay the top crude sellers.

The government must chalk out short, middle, and long-term strategies to end or at least curtail the country’s excessive dependence (around 88 per cent) on imported crude. In the short term, the priority should be to diversify sources of supply, build adequate strategic petroleum reserves, and maintain flexibility in purchasing crude from different markets so that geopolitical disruptions do not immediately translate into domestic price shocks. The government should also strengthen bilateral energy partnerships with major oil-producing countries and explore long-term contracts at competitive prices. In the medium run, India needs to accelerate the transition towards cleaner and more efficient sources of energy. Greater investment in electric vehicles, public transport, biofuels, natural gas, solar and wind power can gradually reduce the demand for imported petroleum. At the same time, domestic exploration and production should be encouraged through stable policies, faster clearances and appropriate incentives, without compromising environmental safeguards. The long-term answer lies in reducing the economy’s structural dependence on fossil fuels. India must expand renewable energy, battery storage, green hydrogen, and other emerging technologies. A broader and more resilient energy mix would not only reduce the import bill but also protect the economy from wars, sanctions, and volatile global oil prices



LETTERS

Delhi PGs are deathtraps

THIS is further to ‘Delhi building collapse was waiting to happen’ (THI Sept 9). The Satya Niketan building collapse in the national capital that has been the PG for students studying in the Delhi University was so pathetic to watch which proved to be a virtual death trap for students with big expectations to make big in life. Similar incidents of fire accidents and building collapse are happening in Delhi NCR, resulting in no follow up action being taken to prevent such tragedies from happening. It is reported that ten or more buildings have been earmarked for demolition in the area, which is a positive development. Meanwhile, there must be a thorough check of PGs in Delhi to assess their structural health, and other safety precautions. The vulnerable ones must be declared unsafe. The Delhi University, on its part, must create more hostel accommodations for students whose numbers are growing every year.

K R Parvathy, Mysuru

Preventive measures must be the norm

Apopen, the Satya Niketan tragedy is painfully predictable, and the response is equally predictable. Politicians express shock, officials promise inquiries, FIRs are filed, and then everyone moves on until the next tragedy. This pattern has repeated itself far too many times. The heart of the problem is that urban governance remains a low priority for our leaders, who are busy with populist schemes and emotive distractions. Illegal constructions flourish, often with the tacit approval of those in power. We cannot keep treating safety as an afterthought. What we need is continuous enforcement, transparent building approvals, regular structural audits, and real accountability for officials and politicians who allow violations. Students and citizens deserve better than a system that only acts after lives are lost. Prevention must finally become the norm.

K Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

Building safety is a collective responsibility

THIS refers to “Delhi building collapse was waiting to happen”. Building safety cannot be ensured by municipal officials alone. Residents, tenants, landlords and local associations also have an important role in identifying warning signs such as cracks, water seepage, unauthorised extensions and damaged structural members. Delhi could establish a simple complaint system through which photographs and location details can be submitted and tracked until action is taken. Municipal authorities should publish inspection outcomes and deadlines for corrective measures. Public awareness programmes can also help residents understand when a building requires professional assessment. Such participation would make safety a continuous community responsibility rather than a matter left entirely to government agencies. Prevention becomes more effective when citizens can see that their complaints lead to timely action.

S P Suganya Devi, Coimbatore

Trafficking menace not among govt priorities

THE ‘Silent auction of innocence’ (THI Sept 9) piece by Nomula Srinivas Rao reflects a system that has accepted its failure. Traffickers move children across states, while the rescued victims are dumped into underfunded shelters, and often re-trafficked. If the state can build surveillance for elections, it can trace missing children. The problem is not technology, but non-prioritisation. Until we have real legislation, inter-state data sharing, and proper support, we are tending to look the other way.

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Cabinet decides to reintroduce students’ elections in varsities, colleges

BENGALURU: The Karnataka Cabinet on Wednesday decided to reintroduce students election in the universities and colleges, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister G Parameshwara said. Political parties will not be allowed to take part in these elections, he said. “Student elections were earlier held in colleges but were subsequently banned. We have now decided to reintroduce elections in universities and colleges,” Parameshwara briefed reporters after the cabinet meeting. He explained that in each college, there will be one student president, two vice-presidents, including one woman, one general secretary, two joint secretaries, including one woman, and an executive committee of six members, including two women. There will be no reservation in these elections as the government does not want to promote caste-based elections among students, the Deputy CM said. The detailed modalities regarding when and how the elections will be held will be decided later, he added.

Parameshwara clarified that the students’ elections are not mandatory for colleges and it can happen only if students want it. “If students don’t want it, they can decide not to have it. The management cannot decide.

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Raising a toast to the mesmerising culinary art



Cooking is the art, science, and craft of preparing, heating, and combining raw ingredients to make them safe, digestible, and flavoury; a vital life skill that directly impacts our health, saves money, builds self-reliance, and connects us to different cultures.

Culinary art is the professional discipline and creative practice of preparing, cooking, and presenting. Serving food is a creative form of expression.

The practice of preparing safe, tasty and nutritious meals, and the need to consume simple, fresh and healthy food together with seasonal vegetables and fruits, has been connected with spiritual matters in various faiths across the world, including Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Greek.

And, according to Greek mythology, Prometheus, the Titan, while not a cook himself, stole fire from Mount Olympus and gave it to humanity. By doing so, he taught mortals how to use fire to cook food and transition from raw diets to civilization.

Among the well-known practitioners of the culinary art are Gordon Ramsay and Sanjeev Kapoor.

In the books of the inimitable P G Wodehouse, Anatole is the supremely skilled

French chef, who is described as ‘God’s gift to gastric juices’. Many people are known to be fond of good and tasty food. In that sense, a ‘gourmet’ is one who appreciates high-quality, sophisticated food, drink, or who judges fine culinary experiences. In a similar sense, ‘foodies’ is a person who has an enthusiastic, refined, or passionate interest in food, eating it not just out of hunger, but as a hobby or lifestyle.

This is perhaps why there is the famed saying, “the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach”, meaning that cooking delicious food is a good way to win someone’s love and affection.

Mythologies of various cultures in the world contain references to famous persons who excelled in culinary art. In Mahabharat, Bheema is known to be a great cook. In fact, when the Pandava princes need to remain incognito for a whole year and are forced to seek shelter in the court of King Virata, Bheema chooses to don the guise of a cook. Meanwhile, Nala, who ruled the Nishada Kingdom, is renowned not only for his valour and wisdom, but also his mastery of the culinary arts.

A good, tasty, nutritious, and balanced spread is recommended across cultures. In the western countries, a 7-course meal is a structured fine-dining experience where seven distinct dishes are served sequentially in a specific order to guide and balance the diner’s palate.

Likewise, in Indian tradition and Ayurveda, there is the term ‘Pancha Bhakshya’ which describes a complete and balanced meal or a grand royal feast, which, when paired with ‘Paramanna’ or sweet rice pudding, repre-



sents a feast that satiates all the five senses and aids proper digestion.

As one looks around the various regions of the world, including India, one encounters many a specific style, method or manner of cooking typical of that place.

Chinese cuisine is known for its diverse culinary tradition, encompassing distinct, regional styles, historical influences and fundamental flavour profiles developed across the country’s geographical landscape.

Rice is the primary staple in the southern and semi-tropical regions while wheat, millet and barley dominate the dryer, northern climates. Dishes frequently build flavours using aromatics and seasonings that are known to be high in protein content.

Mexican cuisine, on the other hand, is celebrated for the ingredients of corn, fresh chilies, avocados, and is famous for the recognition accorded by UNESCO.

Another example is that of French cuisine, which is defined by foundational cooking techniques, fine pastries, sauces, and local cheeses.

Yet another example is the Italian variety, known for fresh Mediterranean ingredients, pasta, and regional pizzas ranked highly on global food lists which feature iconic national dishes, top-rated recipes, and culinary staples from every corner of the planet

And Indian cuisine is acclaimed for spice blends, vegetarian options and distinct regional variations.

Just as in the case of music, dance, sports and games or literature, every nation has its favourite dish. Many such delicacies have gained popularity across the world.

The Pad Thai, a stir-fried rice noodle dish from Thailand, with its sweet, salty,

Just as in the case of music, dance, sports and games or literature, every nation has its favourite dish. Many such delicacies have gained popularity across the world. The Pad Thai, a stir-fried rice noodle dish from Thailand, with its sweet, salty, and sour flavours certainly ranks high in that list. For those who are meat eaters, the Italian Carbonara Pasta, with pork, eggs, cheese, and black pepper would be a close competitor. Not far behind is the Haee of England, the Beef Poh of Vietnam and the Taco Adobada of Mexico.

and sour flavours certainly ranks high in that list. For those who are meat eaters, the Italian Carbonara Pasta, with pork, eggs, cheese, and black pepper would be a close competitor. Not far behind is the Haee of England, the Beef Poh of Vietnam, and the Taco Adobada of Mexico. Also, figuring in the list not for taste, but for popularity and following, is the omnipresent Burger of the USA. Not to be left far behind is the traditional Japanese dish sushi. And, as far as India is concerned, everyone knows that the all-time favourites from different parts of the country, but enjoyed by everyone are butter chicken, biryani, masala dosa, pav bhaji, rasagolla and gulab Jamun. Incidentally, many phrases and idioms relating to the practice of cooking find application in the English language. We have the idiom ‘in a soup’ meaning to be in a difficult, awkward or troublesome situation; ‘half baked’ stands for an idea or plan which has not been fully thought out; a ‘flash in the pan’; ‘out of the frying pan into the fire’; ‘soup to toothpick’ or ‘soup to nuts’, stands for the complete sequence of events in a full meal.

A cookbook or cookery book is a culinary reference work that contains a collection of recipes and instructions for food preparation. Cookbooks serve as comprehensive guides that may include cooking techniques, ingredient information, nutritional data, and cultural context related to culinary practices.

The pleasures of good spread have often been the subject matter of praise in poetry, prose and cultures across the world. Perhaps the most popular among them is the amazing variety and dimension of the dishes prepared for a royal wedding in the yesteryear runaway cult Telugu movie Maya Bazaar.

Bob Hope, the well-known American comedian, actor, entertainer and producer, acts as a hunter in one of his movies titled ‘Call me Bwana’. In one scene, his mother-in-law prepares breakfast for both and serves it to him. Noting his expression after tasting one morsel of the food, she exclaims that, after all, she is an interior decorator and not a cook. And Bob wryly retorts, “Just think what you are doing to mine!”

(The writer was formerly Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)

Reservation must reach the last person: Reform, don’t abolish



INDIA needs a more intelligent affirmative-action architecture: preserve protection against discrimination but deliberately widen first access to families and communities still waiting for opportunity. India’s affirmative-action journey predates the Republic. In 1902, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur reserved 50 per cent of government posts for backward classes, recognising that formal equality meant little when entire communities lacked access to education, administration and power. After Independence, B R Ambedkar and the Constitution gave this principle a durable democratic framework: equality sometimes requires corrective measures where history has produced structural exclusion.

Reservation is not a poverty scheme:

Reservation should not be confused with poverty alleviation. Its central purpose is social

inclusion, representation and protection against entrenched discrimination. A family may gain education or a government job and still encounter caste identity in workplaces, housing, social networks and marriage. One successful generation therefore cannot automatically be treated as proof that discrimination has disappeared.

Who is still waiting?

At the same time, supporters of reservation must confront an uncomfortable question: are the benefits circulating widely enough within eligible groups? Families that have already acquired education, information and networks can often compete more effectively, while a first-generation student from a deprived family may never reach the starting line. The answer is neither to stigmatise repeat beneficiaries nor to abolish reservation. It is to improve its distribution.

A first-opportunity window:

A pragmatic reform would create a ‘first opportunity’ window within the existing reservation categories. Around 25–35 per cent of opportunities should be prioritised for first-time or first-generation beneficiary families. If adequate candidates are unavailable, those opportunities should flow back to the wider



Policy notes: The suggested 25–35 per cent first-opportunity window and deprivation index are proposals for public debate, not current law. Political implementation would require constitutional and legislative scrutiny.

parent category rather than remain vacant. Previous beneficiaries would not suddenly lose all protection; instead, the system would ensure that a meaningful share reaches families that have never received its benefits.

Apply deprivation measures across categories:

The same logic can travel upward across the opportunity structure. Rural or remote schooling, low family income and assets, parental education, first-generation graduate status and poor access to quality schools can disadvantage candidates even outside caste-reserved categories. These factors should supplement—not replace—caste-based safeguards. A transparent opportunity or deprivation index could operate horizontally across categories, because a wealthy rural household and a poor urban household cannot sensibly be treated as identical simply by geography.

Political representation also needs circulation:

The principle should also inform political representation. Within constitutionally reserved political opportunities, India should debate mechanisms that encourage first-generation political entrants and sections that remain under-represented, rather than allowing representation to become concentrated in a small set of political families or networks. A 25–30 per cent first-opportunity principle deserves serious study here too, although any such mechanism would require careful constitutional and legislative design.

Beyond endless sub-caste fragmentation:

The Supreme Court’s 2024 Davinder Singh decision opened constitutional space for sub-classification within Scheduled Castes (SCs). That can help governments address unequal access, but India should be cau-

tious about answering every inequality by permanently multiplying caste compartments. Policy should increasingly ask measurable questions: Who has received opportunities? Who remains excluded? Which families are first-generation entrants? Where is representation still weakest? The goal should be circulation of opportunity, not permanent social fragmentation.

Reform is better than ‘reservation hatao’:

The August anti-reservation mobilisation around Jantar Mantar reflects genuine public dissatisfaction, including demands for greater attention to economic disadvantage. Such concerns deserve democratic debate. But abolishing caste-based affirmative action because its benefits may be unevenly distributed would confuse a problem of design with a failure of purpose. The answer to imper-

fect affirmative action is better affirmative action.

Make reservation less necessary:

The ultimate success of reservation should be measured by whether society gradually needs less of it. That requires far more than quota engineering. India must equalise school quality, enforce anti-discrimination norms in employment and housing, weaken caste barriers in marriage and social networks, and reduce unnecessary caste signalling in routine public life—while retaining caste data where needed to measure exclusion and enforce rights. A mature policy should neither romanticise reservation nor demonise its beneficiaries. It should keep opening doors until birth no longer determines opportunity.

(The writer is Vice-President of Telangana Pradesh Mahila Congress)