

Important Issues of the Day

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Force Majeure

FORCE MAJEURE



- **Major Gulf energy producers like Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain have invoked force majeure on oil and gas exports due to shipping disruptions and infrastructure attacks linked to the 2026 Iran vs. US-Israel conflict.**
- **Force majeure is a legal clause included in contracts that allows a party to suspend or terminate its obligations without penalty when an extraordinary, unforeseeable event makes fulfillment impossible. It essentially pauses the contract because the circumstances are beyond the control of the parties involved.**

Origin:

- **The term is French, literally translating to superior force. It is rooted in civil law but is now a standard feature in international commercial contracts and maritime law worldwide.**

- **Aim: The primary goal is to provide legal protection to businesses or governments. It ensures they aren't sued for breach of contract or forced to pay massive late fees when Acts of God (like earthquakes) or Acts of Man (like war) prevent them from delivering goods or services.**

Naval warships escort Indian vessels from the Gulf of Oman

Three warships escort *Shivalik*, *Nanda Devi*, *Jag Laadki*; warships operating under Operation Sankalp, a mission aimed at safeguarding merchant shipping, protecting India's maritime interests

Saurabh Trivedi
Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy has deployed warships to escort Indian-flagged merchant vessels transiting through the Persian Gulf region, according to official sources.

Three Indian Navy ships have escorted the Indian-flagged merchant ships *Shivalik*, *Nanda Devi*, and *Jag Laadki* from the Gulf of Oman after they crossed the Strait of Hormuz. The warships ensured the safe transit of vessels through vulnerable waters.

Though the conflict has been intense in the Persian Gulf west of Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman, east of the strait, has also seen attacks. *Jag Laadki*, carrying more than 80,000 tonnes of crude oil, left Fujairah terminal in the UAE on Sunday. The vessel had a narrow escape when the terminal was attacked while it was loading.

Sources said that naval ship escort to Indian merchant ships will continue to be provided. Some 22 Indian-flagged ships are still stranded west of the strait.



Safe arrival: LPG carrier *Shivalik* reached the Mundra Port on Monday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

While officials declined to disclose the names of the naval ships involved, a senior official confirmed that the warships were operating in the region under Operation Sankalp, a mission aimed at safeguarding merchant shipping and protecting India's maritime interests in the region.

Launched in June 2019, Operation Sankalp ensures the safe passage of Indian-flagged vessels through critical sea lanes, and saw action, including during the Houthi attacks.

Meanwhile, LPG carrier *Shivalik* reached the Mundra Port on Monday evening, the government con-

firmed. Earlier in the day, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary at the Shipping Ministry, told reporters in an inter-ministerial briefing that priority berthing and documentation had been arranged to ensure there was no delay in discharging the cargo.

Nanda Devi, another LPG carrier, is expected to reach Kandla port on Tuesday. Individually, the vessels are holding 46,000 tonnes of cargo, cumulatively, 92,172 tonnes. "Seafarers on board are all safe and would be reaching tomorrow at Mundra port," Mr. Sinha said. *Jag Laadki* will

be arriving at the Mundra Port on Tuesday.

He said there was "no congestion reported at any of the major ports" with export-bound containers at the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority having reduced to about 3,900 from 5,600.

Addressing reporters at the same briefing, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary at the Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry, said that cooking gas continued to be an "issue of concern" though supply of LPG to domestic consumers continued uninterrupted. No dry out had been reported among distributors, she added.

Separately, in response to a query, the senior official informed that domestic LPG production had increased 36% since the supply maintenance order.

Responding to queries about U.S. President Donald Trump seeking countries send warships to guard passage of vessels from the Strait of Hormuz, Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson at the External Affairs Ministry, said the issue had not been taken up in any bilateral setting.

- **The Indian Navy has deployed warships to escort Indian-flagged merchant vessels transiting through the Persian Gulf region, according to official sources. Three Indian Navy ships have escorted the Indian-flagged merchant ships Shivalik, Nanda Devi, and Jag Laadki from the Gulf of Oman after they crossed the Strait of Hormuz. The warships ensured the safe transit of vessels through vulnerable waters. Though the conflict has been intense in the Persian Gulf west of Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman, east of the strait, has also seen attacks. Jag Laadki, carrying more than 80,000 tonnes of crude oil, left Fujairah terminal in the UAE on Sunday. The vessel had a narrow escape when the terminal was attacked while it was loading.**
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USCIRF is creating a distorted picture of India, says Centre

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), in its latest report, has presented a “distorted and selective picture of India”, the External Affairs Ministry said on Monday.

“For several years now, the USCIRF has persisted in presenting a distorted and selective picture of India, relying on questionable sources and ideological narratives rather than objective facts. Such repeated misrepresentations only undermine the credibility of the Commission itself,” Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said after the USCIRF in its latest report called for “targeted sanctions” against India’s external intelligence agency, the Research & Analysis Wing, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), “for their responsibility and tolerance of several violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals’ and entities assets and barring their entry into the United States”.

The report further said that bilateral trade policies with India should be linked to “improvements in religious freedoms”.



Randhir Jaiswal

“Instead of persisting with selective criticism of India, USCIRF would do well to reflect on the disturbing incidents of vandalism and attacks on Hindu temples in the United States,” Mr. Jaiswal said.

‘Needs attention’

“Growing intolerance and intimidation of members of the Indian diaspora in the United States merit serious attention,” Mr. Jaiswal added.

There have been several incidents of violence against individuals belonging to the Indian community in the U.S. as well as members of the Indian diaspora in the U.S. in recent years.

There have also been several incidents of vandalism at Hindu temples and properties that India has urged the U.S. to address.

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- **Monitoring Religious Freedom:** The USCIRF is tasked with monitoring the universal right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in countries outside the U.S.
- This includes assessing violations based on international human rights standards, particularly Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- **Annual Reports:** The commission produces annual reports that evaluate religious freedom conditions and recommend countries for designation as “Countries of Particular Concern” (CPC) or for inclusion on the “Special Watch List” (SWL).
- **Policy Recommendations:** USCIRF provides policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress regarding actions to address violations of religious freedom.

Crab in Silent Valley found displaying both male and female biological traits

Aathira Haridas

KOCHI

A tiny crab displaying both male and female biological traits on the same body has been discovered in the Western Ghats. Discovered from the forests of the Silent Valley National Park, this freshwater crab belongs to the species *Vela carli* and is both male and female at the same time.

The dual-sex condition was observed in three crabs found in tree holes in Silent Valley.

Vela carli is an endemic freshwater crab found only in the forests and streams of the Central Western Ghats.

The study documents



This phenomenon is rare in *crustaceans* and has never before been reported in the freshwater crab family *Gecarcinucidae*. FILE PHOTO

the first instance of gynandromorphy (a rare condition in which individuals exhibit both male and female characteristics) in *Vela carli*. This phenomenon is rare in *crustaceans* and has never before been re-

ported in the freshwater crab family *Gecarcinucidae*, according to the researchers.

The study was carried out by K.S. Anoop Das and K.T. Fahis from the Centre for Conservation Ecology,

MES Mampad College, in collaboration with scientist and crab specialist Sameer K. Pati and Purnima Kumari from the Zoological Survey of India. Their findings were recently published in the international journal *Crustaceana*.

Mr. Das, Head and Assistant Professor at the Centre, said that while gynandromorphy has been documented in several marine and freshwater crab families, it has not been reported in the family *Gecarcinucidae*.

“The bodies of the crabs displayed male reproductive structures, while other parts showcased female features, including gonopores,” said Mr. Das.



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- ***Velacarli* is an endemic freshwater crab found only in the forests and streams of the Central Western Ghats.**

- **The study documents the first instance of gynandromorphy (a rare condition in which individuals exhibit both male and female characteristics) in *Vela carli*. This phenomenon is rare in crustaceans and has never before been reported in the freshwater crab family Gecarcinidae, according to the researchers.**

Neighbourhood diplomacy and its West Asia challenge

With the sinking of the Iranian warship, *IRIS Dena*, in the Indian Ocean, by the United States on March 4, the war in West Asia came home to South Asia. With each passing day, the war that began on February 28 has reached South Asian homes in a number of ways – disrupting the availability of daily necessities, travel, trade, food and fuel for cooking and transport, fertilizers, and the safety of citizens in the West Asia region.

Approximately 25 million South Asians live and work in West Asia, including 10 million Indians, five million Pakistanis, between five to six million Bangladeshis, two million Nepalis, and significant numbers from Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives. Afghans – between five to eight million – are refugees in Iran. In addition, Indians make up about 15% of the population of seafarers, or crew aboard merchant ships worldwide, along with other South Asians, all of whom are at risk of harm, particularly those positioned around the Strait of Hormuz, where Iran has weaponised access. As New Delhi formulates its next steps in the war, it is necessary to consider not only what it will mean for the whole region but also its own ties with each neighbour.

India's stance could raise eyebrows

It is important to recognise that New Delhi's posture at the start of the war – when U.S.-Israel strikes killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and much of his immediate family – has been out of step with most of the region. Bangladesh and Pakistan issued statements condoling Khamenei's death almost immediately, the Maldives condemned the U.S.-Israel attacks on Iran and Iran's counter-attacks equally, and the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister offered his condolences. In contrast, it took South Block five days to send Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri to the Iranian Embassy.

It took another week for the Ministry of External Affairs to express "grief" over the killing of more than 150 students and teachers at a school for girls abutting a naval base in Minab. Even in the wider region, a statement by Foreign Ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) criticised U.S. and Israel for "initiating" attacks, and subsequent attacks by Iran.

This is less about optics and more about India's – and South Asia's – cultural values: the killing of Khamenei, an 86-year-old religious leader of a state, violated international norms, regardless of how his policies were viewed. That India's statements in the following days condemned Iran's retaliatory strikes without ever criticising U.S. or Israeli actions against Iran and Lebanon is an anomaly.

It is possible to explain the initial reactions in light of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to



Suhasini Haidar

Israel two days before the strikes, and his statement in the Knesset that India would stand with Israel "in the moment and beyond". But as the horror of the escalating war mounts and the Iranian regime demonstrates its resilience, there is a need to calibrate a more balanced response. India's traditional position, of building strong bilateral ties with every country in West Asia, without taking sides in regional fault lines has always kept it in a position of trust and goodwill; this was proven during Mr. Modi's outreach to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian for the passage of Indian ships in the Strait of Hormuz.

In addition, the U.S.'s unabashed pride in bombing *IRIS Dena* near Sri Lanka without even attempting to help the surviving sailors has come as a shock to many in the region. It is admirable that the Indian Navy immediately assisted the Sri Lankan Navy in the rescue operations, and that both Delhi and Colombo offered safe harbour to other Iranian military ships in the area. Yet, the Indian Navy's failure to express its condolences for the deaths of the sailors who had recently been its guests at India's multinational naval exercise MILAN 2026 and the International Fleet Review in Visakhapatnam in February, is difficult to understand.

Economic, regional and maritime security

Going forward, India must reassure its neighbours – other than Pakistan, which it has no relationship with at present – that it remains cognisant of their concerns. As energy shortages deepened, New Delhi received requests for petrol and diesel from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives; landlocked Nepal and Bhutan may follow suit if the situation worsens. India must plan ahead to avoid a repeat of 2021, when it had to halt vaccine supplies to its neighbourhood for several critical weeks to deal with the crisis caused by the spread of the delta variant of SARS-CoV-2. Subsequently, India's "Vaccine Maitri" programme did much to ease those memories, and enforced the need for an "all of region" approach to such situations.

Since 2020, South Asia has been buffeted by several crises: COVID-19, supply chain blockages from India-China tensions along the Line of Actual Control, sanctions affecting grain, oil, and urea amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict, fluctuations in remittances due to constant flare-ups in West Asia, the impact of the Trump administration's tariff policy on the region's labour-intensive apparel and fashion industry, and seafood exports, and the growing shadow of Artificial Intelligence on jobs in a region with a restless young population.

It is not a coincidence that many of India's neighbours have seen youth protests erupt, and new governments installed as a result – an example is Nepal's election on March 5 which brought its first Gen-Z-led government to power.

The Bharatiya Janata Party's poll losses in the general election in 2024, which resulted in Mr. Modi's first minority government within a coalition, are also attributed to the disaffection of unemployed and underemployed youth. The changes have impacted India's diplomacy, as the Modi government has had to amend its more muscular neighbourhood policy to engage leaders elected on these mandates and who are less beholden to India.

India must also recognise that its position as "net security provider" in the region has been challenged by the U.S.'s sinking of the *IRIS Dena*, which cuts more deeply given their joint membership of the Quad (the strategic forum comprising the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia).

At their last meeting in July 2025, the Quad Foreign Ministers issued a statement reaffirming their commitment to "peace and stability" in the Indo-Pacific region and declaring that they "strongly oppose any unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion", a reference to China. With the U.S. behaving unilaterally, India must move to strengthen its own coalitions in the maritime region, including the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Colombo Security Conclave, and the Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) so that it is not caught unawares in the future. South Asia requires more regional trade, connectivity and energy sharing platforms, along with more conversations on regional security, as each country in the subcontinent is a stakeholder.

On the global stage, India's position as Chair of the Quad requires it to host a summit this year – when U.S. President Donald Trump is to visit India. But India's immediate priority should be to convene a Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting to ensure better communication and chart a more stable course for the maritime region in view of the West Asia war.

New Delhi must restore the balance

On the other side of the global North-South divide, India is also due to convene the BRICS Summit in 2026 – while bringing current rivals and BRICS members Iran and the United Arab Emirates to the table may be difficult given current tensions, New Delhi's diplomatic skills must be exerted in forging consensus for a BRICS statement that also highlights South Asia's economic and security concerns. Having momentarily abandoned its balancing act between the U.S.-Israel and Iran, it is time for India to restore the balance in its West Asia policy. New Delhi's traditional position on the tightrope may be tense, but it gives a more beneficial vantage point from which to steer the future of its people and those across the wider neighbourhood.

- **Approximately 25 million South Asians live and work in West Asia, including 10 million Indians, five million Pakistanis, between five to six million Bangladeshis, two million Nepalis, and significant numbers from Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives. Afghans — between five to eight million — are refugees in Iran.**
- **In addition, Indians make up about 15% of the population of seafarers, or crew aboard merchant ships worldwide, along with other South Asians, all of whom are at risk of harm, particularly those**
- **positioned around the Strait of Hormuz, where Iran has weaponised access. India's traditional position, of building strong bilateral ties with every country in West Asia, without taking sides in regional faultlines has always kept it in a position of trust and goodwill; this was proven during Mr. Modi's outreach to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian for the passage of Indian**
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- **Going forward, India must reassure its neighbours — other than Pakistan, which it has no relationship with at present — that it remains cognisant of their concerns. As energy shortages deepened, New Delhi received requests for petrol and diesel from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives; landlocked Nepal and Bhutan may follow suit if the situation worsens. India must plan ahead to avoid a repeat of 2021, when it had to halt vaccine supplies to its neighbourhood for several critical weeks to deal with the crisis caused by the spread of the delta variant of SARS-CoV-2. Subsequently, India's "Vaccine Maitri" programme did much to ease those memories, and enforced the need for an "all of region" approach to such situations.**

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Mains Question

Discuss how the growing influence of China in India's neighbourhood poses strategic challenges for India. Suggest measures to counter these challenges.

भारत के पड़ोसी देशों में चीन के बढ़ते प्रभाव से भारत के सामने उत्पन्न रणनीतिक चुनौतियों पर चर्चा की जाए। इन चुनौतियों से तनपटने के उपाय सुझाए।

Poll bugles

Questions on the SIR apart, the ECI does well to limit the election cycle in April

The people of at least one State will heave a sigh of relief now that the schedule for five Assembly elections – all in April – has been announced. The elections in West Bengal will be held in two phases, unlike the eight in 2021. Spread across so many phases for security reasons, the extended campaigns only turned ugly and vituperative, with the parties stoking passions through personal attacks and communal rhetoric. It is to the credit of the Election Commission of India (ECI) that it has decided to limit the Bengal election to just two phases, which should hopefully focus the contestation and discourse on more pertinent issues. That said, these elections are the second set of polls being held in States/Union Territories (UT) where the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process has been completed. The ECI has yet to provide satisfactory explanations for the anomalies that arose during the SIR. These include a lowered gender ratio in most States except Tamil Nadu and an abnormally high number of deletions compared to the estimated adult population. The deletions are expected to affect short-term migrants and married women. Unlike Bihar, where the electoral variables were decisively in favour of the ruling National Democratic Alliance making the SIR a relative non-factor, it could affect West Bengal, where the sword of Damocles still hangs over 60 lakh people regarding their voting eligibility due to 'logical discrepancies' in their applications, which are still under review by judicial officers.

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The other States and UT, barring Assam, that go to the polls also bring in a distinct element to them unlike most other Indian provinces. Here, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is less of a force and the elections will be decided based on the performance of State governments and local/regional variables. The entry of the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam, led by actor Vijay, and the staying power of the small but steady Naam Tamizhar Katchi party will complicate the battle in Tamil Nadu, even if it is being primarily fought between the two alliances led by the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the opposition All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. In Kerala, the Left Democratic Front faces an uphill battle to counter anti-incumbency, with a resurgent Congress-led United Democratic Front challenging it, alongside a BJP seeking to expand its limited footprint. In Assam, the contest is between the two fronts led by the national parties, the ruling BJP and the Congress. The Congress's inability to rope in the Rajjor Dal led by Akhil Gogoi into its front is a failing that could hurt it in a contest that BJP Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma seeks to frame less as a referendum on governance and more around crass identity politics. This kind of a largely bipolar contest is also expected in Puducherry, where the ruling regional party, the All India NR Congress, in alliance with the BJP, will take on the Congress-DMK-Left-VCK coalition.

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Questions on the SIR

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Mains Question

Discuss how Special Intensive Revision (SIR) contributes to electoral integrity while also posing concerns related to exclusion of eligible voters.

ववशेषे गहनपुनरीक्षण(SIR) ककसप्रकारचुनावीशुचचताकोबढ़ावा देता है, साथहीपात्रमतदाताओं ंकेबहहष्करण से िुड़ी चचंताँभीउत्पन्नकरता है? चचा ाकीजिए।

Belém as a test of a new model of forest finance

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The climate summit that was held in Belém, Brazil in November 2025, refocused renewed global attention to a difficult but unavoidable truth: protecting tropical forests requires more than ambitious pledges – it requires a fundamental shift in who holds power over those forests. As world leaders gathered in the Amazon city, the signature initiative was Brazil's Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF), or a finance mechanism presented as a paradigm shift in global conservation. Yet, amid the flurry of announcements and diplomacy, persistent tensions revealed that major challenges remain around participation, equity and accountability.

The difference

The TFFF proposes to compensate countries for maintaining standing forests, not just for avoiding deforestation. As reported, the Fund has already secured more than \$5.5 billion in initial commitments, including a \$3 billion pledge from Norway. Unlike many past funds, it is not structured purely as a donation vehicle. Rather, it is set up to generate returns and reward long-term forest conservation. Critically, at least 20% of its performance-based payments are reserved for indigenous peoples and local communities, whose daily stewardship plays an outside role in keeping forests intact.

This allocation is not symbolic. According to the Rainforest Foundation US, indigenous and local communities were deeply involved in co-designing the facility. Across months of global consultations, more than 400 community leaders shared their perspectives. The model offers something new: not only financial support but also formal decision-making power. Yet, important gaps remain. For instance, indigenous representatives do not have voting rights on the main governing bodies of the Fund, raising questions about how genuinely inclusive decision-making will be.

Even as the TFFF proposes this inclusive architecture, many civil society groups have



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The real test is whether it will protect the communities protecting the forest

voiced their strong criticism. The Global Forest Coalition (GFC) described the fund as “colonialistic”, arguing that it benefits intermediaries rather than forest peoples. Its worry was about a mechanism built around market logic and financial returns that may not address the root structural causes of deforestation, such as agribusiness expansion, oil and mining projects, and large infrastructure, all of which continue to drive forest loss. According to the GFC, rewarding standing forests without curbing exploitative activities risks creating a superficial conservation narrative.

Compounding this, some critics argue that the payment rate, around \$4 a hectare in earlier proposals, is inadequate given the manifold ecosystem services that forests provide. There is a risk that national governments could absorb most of the funds, while communities on the ground may see little benefit. The success of the TFFF, therefore, depends not just on its size but on strong delivery mechanisms and rigorous, locally accountable institutions.

Conservation overlooks power imbalances

Amid these debates, Brazil has taken steps to buttress access. On the sidelines of COP30, it announced a dedicated digital platform to help forest countries navigate TFFF eligibility. The platform, developed with partners such as the UNDP, FAO, WWF and the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GATC), promises technical assistance, capacity building and peer collaboration. It is stated that independence from the TFFF's governing structures is meant to prevent conflict of interest while focusing on inclusion and knowledge sharing.

This structure matters because forest conservation has long overlooked deep power imbalances. For many indigenous groups, protecting the Amazon is not just an environmental fight but also a struggle for survival. This was clear at COP30, where indigenous protesters entered the venue

demanding territorial rights, insisting that their land cannot be treated as a commodity. Many felt excluded from decisions that directly affect their homes.

Land rights remain central to this debate. Ahead of COP30, the Forest and Climate Leaders' Partnership (FCLP) renewed its Forest and Land Tenure Pledge, committing \$1.8 billion from 2026 to 2030 to support indigenous, local and Afro-descendant communities. The pledge was a key part of the Belém agenda, reflecting scientific warnings that the Amazon's future remains at risk without secure land rights.

Civil society groups also stressed that climate justice and nature protection cannot be separated. Conservation International called COP30 a chance to secure long-term funding for the Amazon, supporting forest protection, community governance and sustainable livelihoods. They warned that sidelining indigenous leadership weakens both climate action and human rights.

Yet, financing alone cannot counter pressures from infrastructure, agribusiness and extractive industries. The protests in Belém showed that money means little without real shifts in power. Without strong accountability, funds risk flowing to intermediaries while local communities continue to face land loss and displacement.

Beyond the money

The TFFF's launch in Belém is a major step, but its credibility depends on whether it actually transfers power to forest communities rather than reinforcing old hierarchies. For indigenous peoples, forests are home and survival. The real challenge is in ensuring that finance reaches them in forms they control, turning promises into lasting protection. A future of genuine conservation will depend on whether global finance strengthens community rights instead of replicating old patterns of exclusion.

The views expressed are personal

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Importance of sex education in academia

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Sexuality, intimacy, and mental health are closely linked yet heavily stigmatised, resulting in a culture of silence; shame and fear surrounding sex and intimacy can exacerbate mental health issues. The WHO has stated that “immense suffering can occur when people lack bodily autonomy, control over their fertility or the freedom to experience safe, consensual and satisfying sexual relationships”. In 2024, the Supreme Court emphasised the need for comprehensive sex education programmes in order to promote open discussions about intimacy and sexual health.

As German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) fellows between Germany and India, the authors' classroom experiences of teaching about the diversity of human sexualities, in both contexts, found that there is a need to resist and challenge the marginalisation, invalidation and disenfranchisement of lived intimacies in higher educational institutions. Deeply ingrained social stigmas, silence and taboos about intimate relationships are perpetuated in academia, evidenced by the miniscule number of courses and discussions on the topic. Academia often promotes a culture of resistance, fear and anxiety over informed exchange and empowering discourse, particularly in the light of increasing student suicides in India. By prioritising a biomedical approach as well as majoritarian norms, higher educational spaces disregard the dimension of pleasure and the impact of socio-cultural and oppressive factors on intimate experiences.

Lack of proper vocabulary

In India, the mental health curriculum is often found to be heteronormative and cisgendered without accounting for sexual marginalisation and human diversity. 'Sexuality' is limited to heterosexual dysfunctions, erasing



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By creating diversity-aware and compassionate learning environments, students can develop the tools to navigate contemporary challenges and create a more inclusive, equitable, and just world

topics such as consent and sexual politics, framing it as a medical issue alone. Complex lived realities and the structural violence faced by queer people are erased, inhibiting the development of cultural and structural competence required for effective clinical practice. As a consequence, sexual minorities often experience institutional discrimination and inadequacies in the provision of support when they access counselling services. With psychologists being increasingly appointed in universities to deal with suicide and mental health problems in India, such ethical and epistemic gaps fail to reckon with oppressive institutional contexts. It diminishes the capacity of mental health professionals to initiate transformative structural change oriented on sexuality, gender and relationship equality.

Exercises to open up

Addressing sensitive topics such as mental health, violence, and intimacy in higher educational settings comes with particular challenges. A workshop and film screening that took place at the University of Münster in Germany featuring a filmmaker who uses unconventional pornography as a form of sex education highlighted some of the difficulties. While appreciating the effort to tackle the issue, students found themselves uneasy during the discussion. Was it appropriate to open up about one's own experiences, or was it safer to maintain a detached, impersonal, and abstract tone, as is often expected in academic settings?

The authors' interactions with students in India and Germany highlighted the importance of creating safer and accountable spaces when teaching sensitive topics. To achieve this, innovative approaches at the beginning of each class can help. Instead of diving straight into theory and methodology, icebreaker exercises and small-group discussions encourage students to share their

personal perspectives on topics. By answering questions like 'What does intimacy mean to you?', students can connect the course material to their own lives and experiences. Such an approach emphasises the need for instructors to foster a classroom environment that builds trust, rapport, and open communication among participants.

Inclusive classrooms

Education should harness the diversity within classrooms and transcend mere knowledge transfer and workforce training, aiming instead to cultivate critical thinking and awareness. This is particularly urgent in today's context, where anti-democratic movements seek to erase and marginalise the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, promoting a narrow and exclusionary view of sexuality and intimacy. Furthermore, it is crucial to address the growing mental health concerns affecting young people, who face immense pressure from family expectations, societal demands, and the weight of multiple global crises. In 2025, the Supreme Court sought responses from the government on integrating transgender-inclusive comprehensive sexuality education into school curricula. In the same year, the Court issued pan-India guidelines to address suicide and mental health issues among students in which gender and sexual orientation figured as reasons for discrimination at higher educational institutions. By creating diversity-aware and compassionate learning environments, students can develop the tools to navigate contemporary challenges and create a more inclusive, equitable, and just world. Fostering allyship and care communities within educational institutions should take precedence over short-term fixes such as hiring more mental health professionals or facilitating isolated events or workshops, without creating a sustained conversation or support system.

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Thank You!

