

# NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

## Sonia Slams Modi Govt's Silence On Khamenei Killing, Demands Debate In Parliament

**NEW DELHI, MAR 3:** In a scathing criticism of the Modi government, Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Tuesday said its silence on the targeted assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is not neutral but an abdication, and raises serious doubts about the direction and credibility of India's foreign policy.

The former Congress president also demanded that when Parliament reconvenes for the second part of the Budget session, the government's "disturbing silence" over the breakdown of international order must be debated openly and without evasion.

In her article published in The Indian Express, Gandhi said there is an urgent need for "us to rediscover" the moral strength and articulate it with clarity and commitment.

"On March 1, Iran confirmed that its Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei, had been assassinated in targeted strikes carried out the previous day by the United States and Israel. The killing of a sitting head of state in the midst of ongoing negotiations marks a grave rupture in contemporary international relations," Gandhi said.

Yet, beyond the shock of the event, what stands out equally starkly is New Delhi's silence, she said.

The Government of India has refrained from condemning the assassination or the violation of Iranian sovereignty, she noted.

Initially, ignoring the massive US-Israeli onslaught, the Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) confined himself to condemning Iran's retaliatory strike on the UAE without addressing the sequence of events that preceded it. Later, he uttered platitudes about his 'deep concern' and talked of 'dialogue and diplomacy' — which is precisely what was underway before the massive unprovoked attacks launched by Israel and the US," Gandhi said.

"When the targeted killing of a foreign leader draws no clear defence of sovereignty or international law from our country and impartiality is abandoned, it raises serious doubts about the direction



and credibility of our foreign policy," Gandhi said in her article.

Silence, in this instance, is not neutral, she asserted.

Gandhi pointed out that the assassination was carried out without a formal declaration of war and during an ongoing diplomatic process.

"Article 2 (4) of the United Nations Charter prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. A targeted killing of a serving head of state strikes at the heart of these principles," she said.

If such acts pass without principled objection from the world's largest democracy, the erosion of international norms becomes easier to normalise, she argued.

"The unease is compounded by the timing. Barely 48 hours before the assassination, the Prime Minister returned from a visit to Israel, where he reiterated unequivocal support for the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, even as the Gaza conflict continues to draw global outrage over the scale of civilian casualties, many of them women and children," Gandhi said.

At a time when much of the Global South, along with major powers and India's partners in BRICS such as Russia and China, have kept their distance, India's high-profile political endorsement without moral clarity marks a visible and troubling departure, she said.

"The consequences of this event extend beyond geopolitics. The ripples of this tragedy are visible across continents. And India's stance is signalling tacit endorsement of this tragedy," she claimed.

Gandhi pointed out that the Congress has unequivocally condemned the bombings and targeted assassinations on Iranian soil,

describing them as a dangerous escalation with regional and global consequences.

"We have extended condolences to the Iranian people and to Shia communities worldwide, reiterating that India's foreign policy is anchored in the peaceful settlement of disputes, as reflected in Article 51 of the Constitution of India. These principles 'sovereign equality, non-intervention and the promotion of peace' have historically been integral to India's diplomatic identity. The present reticence, therefore, appears not merely tactical, but discordant with our stated principles," she said.

The present government would do well to remember that in April 2001, the then prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, during an official visit to Tehran, warmly reaffirmed India's deep ties with Iran, both civilisational and contemporary, Gandhi said.

"His (Vajpayee's) acknowledgement of those long-standing relations seems to hold no relevance for our current government," she said.

Noting that India's ties with Israel have, in recent years, expanded across defence, agriculture and technology, the Congress leader said it is precisely because India maintains relations with both Tehran and Tel Aviv that it possesses diplomatic space to urge restraint.

"But such space depends on credibility. Credibility, in turn, rests on the perception that India speaks from principle rather than expediency.

"This is not merely a moral proposition; it is a strategic necessity. Nearly 10 million Indians live and work across the Gulf. In past crises — from the Gulf War to Yemen to Iraq and Syria — India's ability to safeguard its citizens has rested on its credibility as an independent ac-

tor, not as a proxy," she argued.

She further asked as to why should countries in the Global South trust India to defend their territorial integrity tomorrow if it appears hesitant to defend that principle today.

"The appropriate forum for resolving this dissonance is Parliament. When it reconvenes, this disturbing silence over the breakdown of international order must be debated openly and without evasion," Gandhi said.

The targeted killing of a foreign head of state, the erosion of international norms, and the widening instability in West Asia are not peripheral matters; they touch directly upon India's strategic interests and moral commitments, she asserted.

"A clear articulation of India's position is overdue. Democratic accountability demands no less, and strategic clarity requires it," Gandhi said.

"India has long invoked the ideal of vasudhaiva kutumbakam 'the world is one family. That civilisational ethos is not a slogan for ceremonial diplomacy; it implies a commitment to justice, restraint and dialogue, even when doing so is inconvenient.

"At moments when the rules-based order is under visible strain, silence is abdication," Gandhi said.

India has long aspired to be more than a regional power and it has sought to serve as the conscience-keeper of the world, she said.

That stature was built on a willingness to speak for sovereignty, peace, non-violence and justice even when doing so was inconvenient, she said. "At this moment, there is an urgent need for us to rediscover that moral strength and articulate it with clarity and commitment," Gandhi said.

Khamenei was killed in a major attack by Israel and the US in the early hours of Saturday.

The United States and Israel launched a major attack on Iran on Saturday, with US President Donald Trump calling on the Iranian public to seize control of their destiny and rise against the Islamic leadership that has ruled their country since 1979. (PTI)

## Returnees Recount Fear, Soaring Costs Amid Middle-East Conflict

New Delhi, Mar 3: "I didn't feel any relief, not even during the flight, until I finally landed in Delhi," said Sunil Gupta, one of the several passengers who returned home shaken, as the ongoing conflict in the Middle East involving the US, Israel and Iran has disrupted travel and daily life, leaving many Indians stranded.

Gupta, who was returning from Dubai, said the uncertainty was overwhelming.

"I was very worried because I have never faced such a situation before. Watching everything that was happening around the world made me anxious. All I wanted was to somehow return home and be with my family," he said.

Gupta said even on the flight, he could not relax and kept thinking about the situation until he landed in Delhi.

Tensions have escalated following a coordinated offensive launched by the United States and Israel against Iran on February 28. The US and Israel jointly launched military strikes on the Islamic country on Saturday. Iran responded by firing drones and missiles at Israel and US military in-



stallations across the Gulf, and also at the global business hub of Dubai.

Arvind, a resident of Noida who also returned from Dubai, said many people were stranded after flights got cancelled.

"People had just gone there for a few days and are not able to handle the expenses. The stranded tourists are facing a serious financial burden. That is the biggest problem right now," he said.

He said the flight that he had initially booked was cancelled, forcing him to stay back for four extra days.

"During that time, we

kept hearing about and seeing incidents around us. I personally saw explosions in the sky, but they (missiles) were being intercepted. Even though the missiles were intercepted, witnessing something like that creates fear," he said.

For some families, the distress has been far more personal.

Kunwar Shakeel Ahmed, father of an Indian student studying in Iran, said the situation near his daughter's hostel is frightening.

"Sounds of blasts can be heard. Whatever missiles are being fired are landing very close to where they are

staying. She told me that after one blast nearby, parts of the roof and the plaster of the hostel building fell off. You can imagine what the girls must be going through," Ahmed said.

He recalled what his daughter told him over the phone on Tuesday morning. "She told us to take care of ourselves and not worry too much and added that if God wants, we will meet again."

"When your own child speaks like that, it shakes you from within. Think about the daughter or son you have raised in your lap. How would you feel in such a situation?" he asked.

## SC Fastens Liability Of Paying Penalty On Employer For Delay In Depositing Compensation

**NEW DELHI, MAR 3:** The Supreme Court has fastened the liability to pay penalty on an employer for a delay in depositing the compensation amount under the Employees' Compensation Act, 1923, saying the law is a "social welfare statute" for redressing employees' grievances.

A bench of Justices Arvind Kumar and P B Varale said in a catena of judgments, the apex court has stressed the "liberal and purposive interpretation" of the Act in favour of the employees being a social-welfare legislation.

The bench delivered its verdict on an appeal filed by an insurance firm, challenging a May 2025 order of the Delhi High Court.

The high court had fastened the liability of paying the penalty imposed under section 4A(3)(b) of the Act on the insurance firm.

"The perusal of the statement of objects of the said legislation makes it crystal clear that the said legislation is a social welfare statute brought in by Parliament to redress the grievances of the employees in case of accidents that may occur in or during the course of employment by payment of adequate compensation expeditiously..." the top court said in its February 23 verdict.

It noted that the employee, who was employed as a com-



mercial driver, had died in February 2017 while driving the vehicle.

His legal heirs had preferred a claim petition, seeking compensation under the 1923 Act before the commissioner of the Delhi government's labour department.

In November 2020, the commissioner held that there existed an "employer-employee" relationship and since the death had occurred during and in the course of employment, the employer was liable to pay compensation to the claimants.

The commissioner had fixed the compensation amount at Rs 7,36,680, along with interest.

Noting that there existed a valid insurance policy of the vehicle and the incident had occurred during the policy period, the commissioner granted the employer to indemnify the compensation, which he was held liable to

pay by claiming it from the insurance firm.

The top court noted that the commissioner had also issued a show-cause notice as to why a penalty, not exceeding 50 per cent of the compensation amount, should not be imposed on the employer for the default in paying the compensation within a month.

As the employer neither appeared before the commissioner nor filed a reply to the show-cause notice, the latter in February 2021 imposed a 35-per cent penalty on the employer for delaying the deposit of the compensation amount within a reasonable time without any justification.

Later, the matter went to the high court, which passed the order in May last year.

The insurance firm then moved the top court, aggrieved by the limited aspect of imposition of liability for

payment of penalty under the Act. The apex court noted that the insurance company has undeniably admitted its liability to pay compensation and the interest component under section 4A(3)(b) of the Act, amounting to Rs 7,36,680 plus interest from the date of death till payment.

It said the present form of section 4A(3)(b) was the result of a substitution brought into the principal section by way of the Workmen's Compensation (Amendment) Act, 1995, which came into force on September 15, 1995.

"Thus, when the statute itself has obligated the employer to make the payment within one month, such obligation cannot be countenanced as subservient to any contractual obligation or by-passing the statutory obligation, as the same would tantamount to disregard of the legislative intent envisaged under the said provision," the bench said.

Allowing the appeal, it set aside the high court's order so far as it imposed the liability of paying the penalty on the insurance company.

The top court said "liability is fastened upon the employer i.e., respondent no. 4 herein, to pay the amount of penalty of Rs 2,57,838 as ordered by the commissioner by order dated February 8, 2021, within a period of eight weeks from today".

## Ongoing Middle East conflict to discourage investment into India, offset trade deal positives: BMI

**NEW DELHI, Mar 3:** Fitch Group company BMI on Tuesday said that the ongoing conflict in the Middle East could discourage investment in India, and offset the positive effects of trade deals with the EU and US on GDP.

Despite the favourable readings of policy uncertainty so far in 2026, BMI kept the FY2026/27 growth outlook unchanged, projecting a 7 per cent GDP expansion. It, however, flagged risks to the outlook but said it is currently assessing the geopolitical situation to quantify its impact on India's GDP.

"From March onwards, we expect uncertainty to increase sharply due to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. We believe this will discourage investment in India, offsetting the (EU and US) trade deals' positive effects on GDP," BMI said in its India outlook report.

The US and Israel jointly launched military strikes on Iran on February 28. Iran responded by firing drones and missiles at Israel and US military installations around the Gulf, and also at the



global business hub of Dubai.

BMI said that Iran has issued threats to ships traversing the Strait of Hormuz, and a full closure of the Hormuz Strait could directly reduce GDP by up to 0.5 pp through higher energy costs.

At the same time, the new India-US trade deal and the US Supreme Court's striking down of the Trump administration's reciprocal tariffs could boost India's economy by more than we expect, BMI said.

Following US and Israeli attacks on the Iranian government, military and nuclear facilities, Iran warned

shipping away from the strait, and insurers withdrew coverage, effectively halting tanker movements. The Strait is a narrow 33-kilometre passage connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea. India imports 88 per cent of its crude oil needs, and any rise in prices will swell its import bill as well as fuel inflation.

India and the US, early last month, agreed on a framework to finalise an interim trade deal, under which Washington will cut down the tariffs to 18 per cent. To sign and implement the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement, the frame-

work has to be converted into a legal document.

However, in February, the US Supreme Court ruled that the tariffs imposed by Trump on nations around the world were illegal and that the president had exceeded his authority when he imposed the sweeping levies by using the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977.

Following the court ruling, the US imposed 10 per cent tariffs on all countries for 150 days, effective from February 24. Trump has announced to increase it to 15 per cent, but there is no official order on that yet.

## Embassy of India issues advisory for nationals in UAE amid regional tensions

**ABU DHABI, MAR 3:** The Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi, on Tuesday issued an advisory urging Indian nationals in the United Arab Emirates to avoid unnecessary travel and remain vigilant in view of the current regional situation.

In its advisory, the Embassy advised members of the Indian community to take due care, follow safety guidelines, and adhere to advisories issued by the UAE authorities and the mission from time to time.

It said, "The Embassy in Abu Dhabi and the Consulate General of India, Dubai are continuing to function normally and will issue updates as necessary. For emergency queries, In-



dian nationals may contact the toll-free number 800-46342, WhatsApp at 971543090571, or email at pbsk.dubai@mea.gov.in and ca.abudhabi@mea.gov.in."

The Embassy also referred to its earlier advisory dated February 28, 2026, in which

it had urged the Indian community not to fall victim to rumours and fake news regarding the security situation, and to rely only on official handles of the Embassy, Consulate, and UAE government authorities for updates. Citizens are advised to rely

on official channels for updates, including Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi: @IndemAbudhabi; Consulate General of India, Dubai: @cgidubai; UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs: @mofuae; UAE Ministry of Defence: @modgovae; UAE Ministry of Interior: @moiaue; UAE National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority: @NCEMAUAE; UAE Government Media Office: @UAEmediaoffice; Abu Dhabi Media Office: @ADM-MediaOffice; Dubai Media Office: @DXBMediaOffice

The Embassy stressed that caution should also be exercised while posting information on social media in accordance with UAE authorities' advisories.