

# NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

## Fuel, fertiliser prices may remain high for prolonged period: IMF, World Bank, IEA

**WASHINGTON, APR 14:** The IMF, World Bank and the International Energy Agency said that fuel and fertiliser prices may remain high for a prolonged period as the situation in the Middle East remained uncertain due to the war.

The Heads of the International Energy Agency, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group met here as part of the coordination group they had established earlier this month for a joint response to the energy and economic impacts on the war in the Middle East.

In a joint statement here, the three institutions said the war has forcibly displaced people, impacted jobs, and reduced travel and tourism, which may take time to reverse.

"As we noted earlier this month, the impact of the war is substantial, global, and highly asymmetric, disproportionately affecting energy importers, in particular low-income countries," the statement said.

It noted that the shock has led to higher oil, gas and fertiliser prices, triggering concerns about food security and job losses as well.

"Some oil and gas producers in the Middle East have also seen a dramatic loss of export revenue," they said.



The statement said the situation in the Middle East remains very uncertain, and shipping through the Strait of Hormuz is yet to normalise.

"Even after a resumption of regular shipping flows through the Strait, it will take time for global supplies of key commodities to move back towards their pre-conflict levels and fuel and fertilizer prices may remain high for a prolonged period given the damage to infrastructure."

"Due to supply disruptions, shortages of key inputs are likely to have implications for energy, food, and

other industries. The war has also forcibly displaced people, impacted jobs, and reduced travel and tourism, which may take time to reverse," they said.

The leaders of the three institutions shared their latest assessments, on the eve of the release of IEA's monthly Oil Market Report and IMF's World Economic Outlook.

"We also discussed the situations of the countries most affected by the shock as well as the responses by our institutions. Our teams are working closely, including at country level, to leverage our respective expertise and

help countries through tailored policy advice and, in the case of the IMF and World Bank, financial support where needed," the statement said.

The leaders said they will continue to monitor closely and assess the impact of the war on energy markets, the global economy and individual countries, and to coordinate their response and support to member countries.

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## Govt wants to bring bill aimed at winning 2029 polls, Oppn must reject 'political move': Sibal

**NEW DELHI, APR 14:** Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Tuesday alleged that the Government wants to bring a Constitution amendment bill in Parliament linked to the women's quota law with the "political objective" of winning the 2029 Lok Sabha election through a delimitation that suits the BJP, and urged Opposition MPs to outright reject such a proposal.

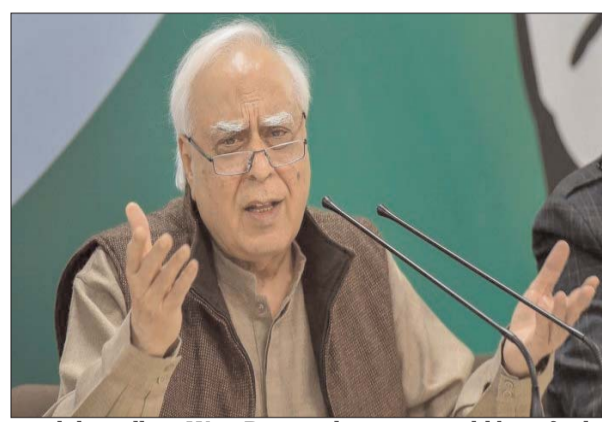
Sibal said if the Government really cares about giving 33 per cent reservation to women, it must bring a bill to reserve women's seats in the existing 543 seats in Lok Sabha.

"The BJP does not do anything without a political objective. They would not bring a bill until it politically benefits them. The 106th Constitution Amendment Bill introduced 334-A which states that the women's reservation law would be implemented after 2026 following the Census and delimitation," Sibal said, adding that this was unanimously passed in Parliament.

"Now they have decided to amend that. They are not saying what change they want. They decided in 2023 that it would be done after Census and delimitation. Now they say that they want it changed," the Independent Rajya Sabha MP said.

Questioning the timing of the move, Sibal claimed that it was targeted at the West Bengal polls.

The Government has called a special sitting of Parliament on April 16, 17 and 18



amid the polls in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, he said.

"TMC and other parties' MPs will campaign there or come here? What would have happened if this were to be taken up after the 29th. The BJP does nothing unless they know they have a political advantage in the process," Sibal said.

He alleged that the BJP is doing all this with the "political objective" of winning the 2029 Lok Sabha elections.

"They know that they have no chance of winning the West Bengal elections so they want to disturb the elections. When women's law would be passed they would say 'we had promised earlier but we are delivering now'. If they are really concerned about women's reservation, they should say, and all opposition should agree, that women's reservation would be provided on the existing 543 seats in Parliament," the former Union minister said.

"You will not do that because that is not their objective," he said, slamming the BJP.

Giving an example of how

the move would benefit the BJP, Sibal said the reported proposal for delimitation is to increase seats in Lok Sabha for every state by 50 per cent.

"So for Uttar Pradesh which has 80 seats, the number would go to 120, while for Tamil Nadu, which has 39 seats, the figure would climb to only 59. In real terms the difference which was 41 would now be 61 seats," Sibal said.

"In the northern belt, the BJP had won 127 out of 238 seats and in southern India they have won 29 out of 130. So they want to increase seats and get a larger share in the northern belt. Difference would give them a political advantage," Sibal claimed.

He said the BJP would have de facto power to turn delimitation to their advantage through "pocket vetoes".

"The Chairman of the delimitation commission would be a pocket veto. We have seen what happened in Jammu and Kashmir and Assam. They (BJP) will decide which constituencies will benefit them, they will

work for their own benefit through the delimitation Commission," he alleged. Geographic Reference

"They are taking the census of 2011 but if the census is being done now, why the need for this bill. The registrar general has said the data will come by 2027. So they can bring that bill then," Sibal said.

They want to do a delimitation through "pocket veto" and win the 2029 election, he claimed.

"No opposition member of Parliament should accept this. They require a two-thirds majority and we should reject it because they are playing politics with the future of India and destroying the federal structure of India," Sibal said.

No member of the Opposition in Parliament should allow it, he asserted.

The Budget Session of Parliament has been extended, and a special three-day sitting of the House has been convened from April 16 to 18, during which amendments to the 'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam', more commonly known as the Women Reservation Act, will be brought for its implementation in 2029.

While elections in Puducherry, Assam and Kerala were held on April 9, polls in West Bengal would be held in two phases on April 23 and April 29. In Tamil Nadu, polls will be held in a single phase on April 23. (PTI)

## BJP, RSS destroying Constitution with hate-filled thinking: Rahul Gandhi in Bengal

**RAIGANJ/MALDA (WB), APR 14:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday launched a two-pronged attack in poll-bound West Bengal, accusing the BJP and the RSS of destroying the Constitution with their "hate-filled thinking", while claiming the ruling TMC has failed in fulfilling its promise of providing jobs to the state's youth.

Addressing poll rallies in Raiganj and Malda, Gandhi claimed that 84 lakh youths in Bengal have applied for the unemployment allowance promised by the Mamata Banerjee government.

"Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee promised jobs to five lakh people. But 84 lakh youths have applied for unemployment allowance," he said.

Targeting the BJP and RSS, the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha accused the two outfits of destroying the Constitution by their "hate-filled thinking" and being "involved in vote theft".

Gandhi termed the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls "unconstitutional" and alleged that wherever the BJP and RSS get a chance, they make insinuations against the Constitution.

He accused the BJP of pitting one community against the other in the name of religion and caste to win elections.

Gandhi claimed that once the Congress forms a government, the names of those wrongly struck off the electoral rolls under SIR will be reinstated.

Claiming the Trinamool



Congress cannot take on the BJP across the country, he said the Congress is the only party which can stand up against and defeat the saffron camp.

Gandhi accused the TMC of being responsible for "joblessness" in West Bengal. "The TMC has closed all industries in Bengal and is running the state through syndicates," he alleged.

Claiming the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre has not given Rs 2 lakh crore due for Bengal and also deprived the state of funds under the MNREGA, the Congress leader said, "The TMC is also not far behind in corruption."

Referring to ponzi scams such as the Saradha and Rose Valley cases, he claimed that "syndicates run by TMC members" benefit from graft. Gandhi also accused the TMC of indulging in violence and making false promises.

Taking a jibe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over India and the US agree-

ing on a trade deal, the former Congress chief said, "It will lead to closure of small and mid-size industries, and cause job loss in India."

Gandhi claimed that 35 lakh documents of the controversial Epstein files are yet to be made public, and the key to that is with US President Donald Trump.

"PM Modi's control is in the hands of Trump," Gandhi said while slamming the prime minister over the India-US trade deal, claiming that it would "harm the people of the country, including Bengal, the workers, farmers and small traders".

He alleged that PM Modi has opened up the country's agriculture sector to the USA, allowing it to sell its farm produce in India.

"India's agricultural sector will be devastated. Modi sold off India in the trade deal with the US. He is not 'desh bhakt' (patriot), he is 'desh drohi' (traitor)," Gandhi alleged while addressing the rally in Malda, where the

Congress traditionally has had a strong presence.

The Congress leader also accused the Modi government of handing over India's energy security to the US by "succumbing to Washington's pressure".

Stating that data security is of paramount importance as a country's strength is built on it, Gandhi accused the Modi government of giving up India's data to the USA. "National security has been badly harmed by this," he said.

Alleging that the Modi government has given a commitment to the US that it would buy goods from it worth Rs 9.5 lakh crore, Gandhi said, "If American goods enter India like a tsunami, then our country's small and medium scale factories will close down."

"This will cause double loss for Bengal since Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has already closed down industries in the state," he said. (Agencies)

The contacts are ongoing for the revival of stalled negotiations between the US and Iran, and talks may be held again before the end of the two-week ceasefire on April 21. The Express Tribune newspaper reported, citing highly placed sources.

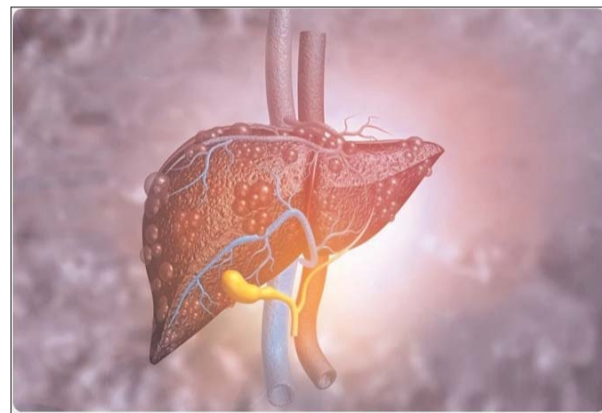
They said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar and Field Marshal Asim Munir are making hectic efforts to ensure the second round of talks, which may end the Gulfwar.

## 1.3 bn people had liver disease globally in 2023: Lancet study

**NEW DELHI, APR 14:** About 1.3 billion people around the world were living with Metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD) in 2023, marking a 143 per cent increase since 1990, a study published in *The Lancet Gastroenterology and Hepatology* journal has estimated.

The analysis, based on data from the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study (GBD) 2023, also projected that global cases of MASLD could rise to about 1.8 billion by 2050, driven largely by population growth and lifestyle changes, including increasing rates of obesity and high blood sugar.

Researchers forming the GBD 2023 MASLD Collaborators also found that regions such as North Africa and the Middle East had disproportionately



higher rates of MASLD than other regions.

They also found that although more people are developing the disease, the overall impact on health — measured in years lost due to illness or death — has remained stable.

The result suggested that advances in treatment and care are helping people live longer and healthier, and that the increase in the number

of cases is mostly happening in the early stages of the disease, the researchers said.

However, the growing number of cases still means that many people are at risk of developing serious complications including liver cirrhosis or cancer in the future, they said.

The findings highlight that MASLD is increasingly affecting younger adults in

low- and middle-income countries, amid urbanisation and lifestyle changes, the team said.

The study also underscores the importance of recognising MASLD as a global health priority and of developing dedicated policies, awareness campaigns, and interventions to mitigate its growing impact and prevent future complications, they said.

"In 2023, approximately 1.3 billion individuals were estimated to be living with MASLD (ie, 16.1 per cent of the global population), with an age-standardised prevalence rate of 14,429.3 per 1,00,000 population, representing a percentage increase of 142.7 per cent in crude numbers from 1990 and of 28.6 per cent in the rate (11,217.2 per 1,00,000 in 1990)," the authors wrote. (PTI)

## US, Iran may meet again in Islamabad for second round of talks by next week: Report

**ISLAMABAD, APR 14:** Pakistan is engaged in high-level contacts to bring Iran and the US back to the negotiating table and the two sides may meet again in Islamabad for a second round of talks by next week, according to a media report on Tuesday.

The contacts are ongoing for the revival of stalled negotiations between the US and Iran, and talks may be held again before the end of the two-week ceasefire on April 21. The Express Tribune newspaper reported, citing highly placed sources.

They said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar and Field Marshal Asim Munir are making hectic efforts to ensure the second round of talks, which may end the Gulfwar.

In some high-level meetings held in Islamabad, indi-

cations have been given to prepare for the next round of talks between the top leadership of the two warring sides, who held the first direct negotiations in 47 years over the weekend.

According to certain sources, the next round of negotiations could take place in Islamabad on Thursday.

However, on the same date, Prime Minister Shehbaz is also scheduled to visit Saudi Arabia at the invitation of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The prime minister will undertake short visits to Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

After almost six weeks of the West Asia conflict and with less than two hours before US President Donald Trump's deadline for Tehran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, PM Shehbaz announced on April 8 that both sides had agreed to a two-

week ceasefire.

On April 11, a US delegation led by Vice President JD Vance and an Iranian delegation led by Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf held a marathon session in Islamabad to find a peaceful resolution of a conflict that started on February 28.

The US and Iran failed to reach an agreement.

On Monday, Prime Minister Shehbaz reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to playing a key role in promoting lasting peace in the region, while expressing hope that the recent direct talks between the US and Iran would yield positive results.

Chairing an emergency meeting of the cabinet, the prime minister voiced satisfaction over progress in the negotiations and said Pakistan remained optimistic about a constructive out-

come. The prime minister said the Islamabad talks helped dispel the clouds of war hovering over the region and created prospects for peace amid global economic uncertainty.

He added that throughout history, agreements such as the Oslo Accords, Geneva Accords and Good Friday Agreement had taken years to materialise, but Pakistan's efforts facilitated a breakthrough dialogue between two adversaries.

The federal cabinet on Monday also unanimously passed a resolution to pay tribute to the country's leadership for bringing the two sides together and ending nearly half a century of deadlock, and expressed hope that these sincere efforts would lead to lasting peace worldwide. (PTI)

## Pakistan's KP Govt amends Hindu Marriage Act to simplify marriage registration

**PESHAWAR, APR 14:** Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government has amended the Hindu Marriage Act 2017 to simplify and streamline the process of registering Hindu marriages at the local level, an official said.

According to the official,

under the newly enacted Hindu Marriage (Amendment) Act 2026, members of the Hindu community will now be allowed to appoint marriage registrars at the district level to facilitate the formal registration of marriages.

The amended law intro-

duces changes in Clause 2 of Section 1, including the revision of the nomenclature of "Marriage Registrar", who will now be appointed under Section 7 of the act.

The amendment also provides that one or more registrars may be appointed in each district to ensure better

access and convenience for the Hindu community.

The official said the key objective of the amendment was to empower local Governments to issue licenses for Hindu marriage registration, making the process more efficient, accessible, and organised. (PTI)