

CHINA'S PAK PREM

China admitting its role in helping Pakistan during Operation Sindoor has exposed Beijing's double standards towards combating terrorism. India's operation Sindoor was not against people of Pakistan but against terrorism and terror-infrastructure. Also it was not a surprise for those understanding strategic affairs as the operation was in retaliation to Islamabad's use of terrorism as a tool of foreign policy against India. Specifically, the Operation was in retaliation to killing of 26 Indians in Kashmir on the basis of religion. China did condemn it then but then whitewashed its own act by siding with Pakistan during Operation Sindoor. India has exposed China's backing of terrorists at the UN Security Council in motions to declare those based in Pakistan as proscribed. China with all its pep talk against terrorism must take a clear stand – does it stand for states that sponsor terrorism or those fighting it with absolute precision.

BRICS AND WEST ASIA

Amid the West Asia crisis the BRICS Foreign Ministers' meet in New Delhi on May 14-15 holds a huge significance. More importantly, Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi is attending the meeting. Iran being a party to the war and blockade of Strait of Hormuz, the vital link of the global trade, is an important country at any multilateral forum. BRICS has emerged as an important global body with major and fast growing economies on board. Araghchi confirmed his impending visit to New Delhi and also outlines the significance of global cooperation through organisations like BRICS and SCO. At this stage of the war in West Asia which is a stalemate, involving Iran in global forums may be useful. Iran, which is looking at the situation through its lens may realise that ending the war will not only pave for peace and resumption of the normal trade it will also create a lot of goodwill for Iran.

Gourav Vallabh

The headlines from West Asia and Eastern Europe carry the same uncomfortable subtext: the price of crude oil is no longer determined solely by supply and demand. It is shaped by sanctions, shipping disruptions, fragile ceasefires, and the calculations of producer cartels that often find higher prices congenial. Brent crude has held close to USD 95 a barrel for several months, and experience from 2008 and 2022 suggests that such geopolitical premia tend to persist.

For India, which imports more than 85 per cent of the crude oil it consumes, this is not an abstract concern. Every USD 10-per-barrel increase in crude prices typically raises pump prices by about 4.5 per litre, placing pressure on household budgets. Yet retail fuel prices have remained largely unchanged since May 2022, despite considerable volatility in global markets. This apparent calm reflects a form of managed stability. Oil marketing companies – Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum, and Hindus-

tan Petroleum – have absorbed a significant portion of the volatility. Estimates suggest that this entails substantial under-recoveries on both petrol and diesel, with corresponding effects on profitability and investment capacity.

Such arrangements, while providing short-term predictability, carry broader economic implications. The first is investment: resources absorbed at the retail level are resources not deployed towards refinery modernisation, green hydrogen, and the wider energy transition that India will inevitably navigate. The second is expectations: even without engaging deeply with petroleum economics, citizens recognise patterns, including the likelihood of deferred adjustments over time. The third implication is more subtle but equally important: the attenuation of the price signal itself. When fuel prices remain static, consumption patterns adjust less dynamically. Households do not recalibrate commuting choices, and logistics operators have limited incentives to optimise routes. Over time, the economy forgoes the incremental adjustments that cumulatively build re-

The global failure to protect women

Archana Datta

The latest World Bank report, Women, Business and the Law, after reviewing 190 world economies, revealed that only 4 per cent of women worldwide enjoy full legal equality. The countries in which women have such equal legal rights, scoring 100/100, are Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and Sweden, and more recently, Germany and the Netherlands (WEF). Women in India have only 60 per cent of the legal rights granted to men, lower than the global average of 64.2 per cent. Nevertheless, Indian women fared better than their South Asian counterparts, where there is only 45.9 per cent of legal protection comparable to men.

The World Bank's 2026 report showed a considerable dip in the overall global percentage of women enjoying equal rights from 77 per cent in 2024 to 64 per cent in 2025, which the report attributed to the inclusion of 'safety for women' as one of the critical indicators in the overall assessment. While the UN Women and UN System reports in 2026 highlighted that justice systems have been failing women in protecting them from violence and discrimination. In over 54 per cent of countries, rape is still not defined based on consent, and in nearly 3 out of 4 countries (74 per cent), laws still permit child marriage, often through exceptions regarding consent. In 112 countries, marital rape is still not criminalised. Around 1.8 billion women live in countries which do not specifically protect them from online abuse. While in 44 per cent of countries, the law does not mandate equal pay for work of equal value.

Nevertheless, the number of countries having laws against violence against women (VAW) has grown significantly. However, legal experts and researchers contend that many of them are not 'comprehensive legislations', lacking clear conceptualisation of different forms of VAW – physical, sexual, psychological or economic – covering private and public spheres, and often falling short of adopt-



ing a holistic and multi-sectoral approach with measures for prevention, protection, prosecution, and reparations. As of 2026, at least 162 countries have laws against domestic violence, but only about 55 per cent of them have all-encompassing provisions. In 151 countries, there are laws prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace, but only 39 countries have specific laws addressing it in public spaces. According to Women, Business and the Law 2024, countries have established less than 40 per cent of the frameworks necessary to effectively implement laws against child marriage, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and femicide, creating an 'enforcement deficit'.

In India, women's safety laws have definitely undergone changes with new Acts and amendments to the existing ones in the aftermath of the 2012 Nirbhaya episode and through the recent Bharatiya Naya Sanhita updates. However, the latest ground reports reveal a dual reality, indicating that the legal protections for women's safety remain confined largely 'on paper', with a stark 'on-ground' disconnect, driven by systemic failures such as pervasive underreporting, an

abysmally poor conviction rate, tardy judicial processes, inefficiency in resource utilisation and absence of women's representation in law enforcement and justice dispensation mechanisms. While a 2025 multi-state field analysis suggested that legal and policy frameworks must move beyond reactive and scheme-based interventions towards a coordinated and survivor-centred institutional ecosystem, strengthening accountability mechanisms, inter-departmental coordination, and investing in long-term rehabilitation and reintegration. Some social scientists also contend that the issues of gender and labour force participation should be seriously addressed, as law-and-order and safety concerns intersect with each other, limiting women's economic empowerment and mobility (Saha, 2014).

While national laws are often handicapped by 'implementation gaps', at the global level there is a significant 'normative gap' with no single, legally binding global treaty dedicated specifically to ending VAW, and no uniform definition of violence or a specific international monitoring body with the power to hold erring states legally accountable. The world is

run more on a patchwork of broad anti-discrimination treaties and non-binding 'soft law' declarations, mostly emanating from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Convention also has several limitations, and its original 1979 text does not explicitly define or even mention any form of VAW, such as serious offences like 'rape' or 'domestic abuse'. The CEDAW Committee only interpreted violence against women as a form of discrimination. However, the subsequent Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) addressed the issue, but it is only a resolution, not even a treaty, and is not legally binding on states. Global legal frameworks also failed to keep pace with new forms of violence committed in digital spaces such as AI-generated deepfakes or non-consensual pornographic images, 90-95 per cent of which depict women.

Now, when justice is denied to women and girls, the damage goes far beyond any single case... it creates all-pervasive impacts, eroding public trust, weakening the rule of law and denying institutions their legitimacy (UN Women). It also has repercussions for the economy, as it has been estimated that elimination of discriminatory laws and practices could increase the global GDP by more than 20 per cent, almost doubling the global growth rate over the next decade (World Bank).

Moreover, the economic costs of VAW not only affect the victims or survivors but also the state and communities, both tangibly and intangibly. While nations must further strengthen their legislative, supportive and enforcement frameworks against VAW, they must also come together for a legally binding global treaty to standardise protections and eliminate legal impunity worldwide for a just, prosperous and equitable world.

The writer is a former Director General of All India Radio, a retired Indian Information Service officer, and a media educator; Views presented are personal.

WHEN A FEW FLOUT RULES, ALL PAY THE PRICE

Sanjay Chandra

A recent conversation with my wife and daughter proved revealing, bringing together observations from within our residential society. My wife had taken the initiative to set up an in-house compost plant within the condominium, aligned with state regulations that mandate bulk waste generators to process their own waste, failing which penalties may be imposed. Yet, what followed was resistance. Several residents opposed the move, citing concerns about foul odour.

One argument was that the government itself is failing in its duties, and that the sight of uncollected garbage in public spaces stands as evidence of this apathy; in such a scenario, our own lapses seemed inconsequential. The estate management staff remains indifferent; for them, the plant exists more in form than in function. It is convenient because when responsibility is diffused across a system, accountability tends to disappear.

What is perhaps overlooked in such resistance is that these measures are not merely regulatory burdens, but responses to a growing environmental crisis. When a few choose not to comply, the consequences do not remain confined to them but are passed on to everyone else.



This is evident not only in how we handle waste, but also in how we engage with shared resources such as water, reflected in steadily declining groundwater levels. A neighbour had once suggested that there was a need to ration water supply within the society. My immediate response was shaped by a different expectation – that one of the reasons for moving into a builder apartment was uninterrupted water supply.

My daughter was direct in her assessment, arguing that rationing would even-

tually become inevitable, because without restraint, survival itself would be at risk. Her view, though uncomfortable, carried a certain inevitability, and it raised a larger and more difficult question, one that extends beyond water to many such instances of rule-flouting: should a few be made to bear the consequences for the actions of others?

There is a tendency to justify violations simply because others have done the same. A number of residents, including some office-bearers of the Residents' Welfare As-

sociation, have chosen to cover their kitchen balconies despite builder guidelines prohibiting such modifications due to fire safety concerns and stipulations from the gas supplier. When one such office-bearer was requested to rectify the alteration, the response was not one of compliance, but of deflection – suggesting that the matter be taken up first with another senior member who had committed a similar breach.

What makes this more concerning is that such disregard rarely remains an individual act; it gradually alters the system itself, where the consequences are no longer limited to those who default, but are borne collectively, often by those who have complied. S

ystems exist to create order, but they depend on individuals to sustain them, and when rules become negotiable, the system itself begins to erode. The answer, then, may lie in recognising that individual responsibility and systemic reform must operate together. When responsibility is shared without accountability, the consequences are borne by all, even when the failure lies with a few.

The writer is founder of Kala - Krazy About Literature And Arts, is an author, speaker, coach, arbitrator, and strategy consultant; Views presented are personal.

Why India needs rules to manage oil shocks

Gourav Vallabh

The headlines from West Asia and Eastern Europe carry the same uncomfortable subtext: the price of crude oil is no longer determined solely by supply and demand. It is shaped by sanctions, shipping disruptions, fragile ceasefires, and the calculations of producer cartels that often find higher prices congenial. Brent crude has held close to USD 95 a barrel for several months, and experience from 2008 and 2022 suggests that such geopolitical premia tend to persist.

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tan Petroleum – have absorbed a significant portion of the volatility. Estimates suggest that this entails substantial under-recoveries on both petrol and diesel, with corresponding effects on profitability and investment capacity.

Such arrangements, while providing short-term predictability, carry broader economic implications. The first is investment: resources absorbed at the retail level are resources not deployed towards refinery modernisation, green hydrogen, and the wider energy transition that India will inevitably navigate. The second is expectations: even without engaging deeply with petroleum economics, citizens recognise patterns, including the likelihood of deferred adjustments over time. The third implication is more subtle but equally important: the attenuation of the price signal itself. When fuel prices remain static, consumption patterns adjust less dynamically. Households do not recalibrate commuting choices, and logistics operators have limited incentives to optimise routes. Over time, the economy forgoes the incremental adjustments that cumulatively build re-



silience to external shocks.

The argument for moving to a rule-based system is rooted in practicality, not ideology. What is needed is a simple, transparent framework that replaces discretion with predictability. One way to do this is to define a normal price band for crude oil, say USD 65 to 90 per barrel, within which retail fuel prices adjust freely in line with global markets. When prices move beyond this band, an automatic sharing mechanism can come into play: part of the increase is absorbed through

calibrated reductions in central excise, while the rest is passed on to consumers.

Crucially, the system should work both ways. When global prices fall, a portion of the gains can be set aside into a stabilisation fund, with the remainder passed through to consumers. Over time, this creates a self-correcting buffer: good years finance the difficult ones. The result is a system that is predictable, even-handed, and less reliant on ad hoc interventions, while still protecting both con-

sumers and fiscal stability.

India is well-positioned to operationalise such an approach. The digital public infrastructure developed over the past decade – from Aadhaar to UPI and direct benefit transfers – offers a robust foundation for targeted support in exceptional circumstances. In periods of sharp price increases, vulnerable groups such as farmers, transport operators, and low-income households could receive calibrated assistance without distorting price signals across the board.

Importantly, the broader reform orientation of the Narendra Modi government, particularly its emphasis on transparency, digitisation, and institutional capacity-building, provides a strong enabling context for advancing such rule-based frameworks in energy pricing. A durable framework would also require alignment across stakeholders. Oil marketing companies would benefit from greater predictability in pass-through mechanisms. State governments could play a complementary role by ensuring that tax adjustments remain consistent with broader stabilisation objectives. Consumers, in turn, would gradually

adapt to modest and regular price movements as a normal feature of a responsive system.

India has successfully implemented far more complex reforms. The Goods and Services Tax required sustained coordination across jurisdictions, and the Aadhaar ecosystem evolved through iterative refinement before achieving scale. Compared to these, a rule-based fuel stabilisation mechanism is technically modest. The necessary data and policy instruments already exist; what remains is their systematic integration.

In an increasingly uncertain global energy environment, the objective is not to eliminate volatility but to manage it with clarity and consistency. A framework that combines market signals with institutional safeguards can strengthen both economic resilience and policy credibility. As geopolitical uncertainties persist, such an approach would position India to navigate external shocks with greater confidence and stability.

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