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## 25th June 2025



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- A reset in West Asia, a 'de-escalation' for the world
- The need for gender equity in urban bureaucracy
- Nuclear spectre: Israeli and U.S. actions against Iran amount to nuclear brinkmanship
- For first time, India breaks into top 100 in global SDG rankings

## A reset in West Asia, a 'de-escalation' for the world

### Context:

Israel and the U.S. bombed Iran's nuclear facilities, and most countries in West Asia and beyond either supported it or stayed silent.

Even major powers like Russia and China, who have strong ties with Iran, chose not to intervene.

## A reset in West Asia, a 'de-escalation' for the world

**W**est Asia has been reset with the bombing of Iran by Israel and the United States. It has been done with the tacit or open approval of almost all countries in the region and beyond. The Europeans have been their usual contradictory noisy self, but made no difference to what is unfolding in West Asia. Even Russia and China, which signed, with much fanfare, Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreements with Iran in January 2025 and March 2021 respectively, were silent spectators. It is not that all these countries were helpless. They made a conscious decision not to interfere when Iran and its proxies are being dismantled in the region.

### The reality now

Now with the so-called Iranian nuclear threat being rendered ineffective, West Asia is faced with a sole dominant nuclear power – Israel. The region has 40,000 American troops stationed on its soil in addition to numerous air and sea assets. They will make sure that there is no more military challenge to Israel. West Asia will now live with this reality.

Initially, the Gulf and other countries of West Asia feared, probably rightly, Iran and its proxies as much as the Israelis. The Iranian strategic and military depth in the region, when seen through the prism of its political ideology, made it the predominant threat in the region. In some ways, the presence of an aggressive Iran made the Gulf countries soft pedal, and even make compromises on many other issues which the region has been plagued with, including Palestine. They needed Israel and the U.S. to balance their vulnerability vis-à-vis Iran, which only encouraged Israel to go all the way out to dismantle the Iranian proxies, both state and non-state actors, in Lebanon, Syria and Gaza. The threat has receded except perhaps for the Houthis in Yemen and the militias in Iraq. In the meantime, the Gulf countries have been busy building bridges with the U.S. administration and waiting to operationalise Abraham Accords, which normalised their relations with Israel. They have made U.S. President Donald Trump happy by doling out goodies. But, with the cutting down of Iran to size in West Asia, do they relish the prospect of an Israel without any checks? Probably not. Can they do something at least now?

Iran has hit back. Its missiles have targeted U.S. military bases in Qatar – the biggest U.S. base in West Asia with 10,000 personnel, and in Iraq. Iran claimed proportional retaliation in that the number of missiles used was equal to the number of bombs the U.S. used to attack Iran's nuclear facilities. This represented a dangerous



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escalation, violating the territorial integrity of one of its own "brotherly" countries, Qatar, and with the situation threatening to spiral out of control. The retaliation was not entirely unexpected.

For Iran's leadership, it is an existential crisis. For the Supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the leadership, surrendering or keeping quiet in the face of these attacks are not options if they must survive politically.

They know that the end game is regime change to dismantle their theological foundation and political ideology – an ideology which threatens everyone in the region. To that extent, the war with Iran is still a work-in-progress for Israel and the U.S. They will not stop until they do a "Syria" on Iran. But there is no alternate "regime" waiting to take their place. Consequently, for their own good, the Gulf states need to step up now to prevent an Iraq- or a Libya-like collapse, which will destabilise everyone in the region. Destabilising regimes in the region has only given a fillip to Islamic fundamentalism and to terrorist organisations such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda.

### As one spat ends another crisis begins

The dramatic announcement by the U.S. of an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Iran is a surprising voice of reason, at a time when reason has become the biggest casualty in West Asia. After retaliation for the U.S. bombing and proving to the world – and more importantly to its people – that it will not be cowed down, the ceasefire call gives Iran a way out to back down. Let us not forget that Israel too has been hit hard though the western media has played it down. The fact that Iran was ready to hit American bases in the Gulf would have weighed on the U.S. to pressure Israel to stop.

It is also a wakeup call for the Gulf leadership that they are not immune. Hopefully, this should stop Iran from making good on other threats such as closing the Strait of Hormuz or exiting the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The focus shifts back to the nuclear deal, where both the U.S. and Iran may well be in a mood to find a solution. It is time for the Gulf states to support this process, even if it is late, to save the region from further conflagration.

While this spat sputters to an end, the next crisis in West Asia is in the making. With the long-cherished dream of Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu realised under Mr. Trump – to take out Iran's nuclear programme – his domestic political fortunes have been revived dramatically. There are hardly any obstacles now for him to realise his "Eretz Israel" dream – the promised land from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean Sea. This is the New Middle East

map which Mr. Netanyahu waved before the UN General Assembly to 193-member states – a map without Gaza or the West Bank. Israeli plans to annex them very soon and certainly before the U.S. presidential elections in 2026. If his main ultra-right coalition ministerial colleagues Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich are to be believed, and there is no reason why they should not be, this annexation will happen this year. All state and non-state actors, which can potentially oppose the move, have been defeated or chastised. The U.S. is also in sync with Mr. Netanyahu in his ambitions. The question will then boil down to these: After its annexation of Palestinian territories, will Israel continue to be an apartheid state by choice to preserve its Jewishness, where the Palestinians will not enjoy equal citizenship and remain second class citizens? Or it will become a genuine democracy by giving the Palestinians equal rights as its Jewish citizens. History indicates that it will be the first.

While the opposition to this annexation should come from countries within the region, the Gulf leadership has almost given up pushing Israel for a Palestinian state or even stopping the Gaza war as the price to pay for regional stability and integration with Israel and the outside world. Their noisy protestations within and outside the UN notwithstanding. However, if they think that peace and security will be restored by annexing Palestinian territories or even status quo of occupation retained (56,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, those displaced, face daily threats, starvation and displacement, while people in the West Bank are driven out of their homes to make way for Jewish settlers), they may be forced to rethink their strategy.

### India's stand

Expectedly, India has neither made pronouncements on the Israeli preemptive strikes on Iran nor taken an active role – just as it has not in other wars elsewhere. Israel was one of few countries to stand by India during Operation Sindoor. However, India's joint initiatives with Iran, including Chabahar port connectivity, are equally important. India's stakes in the region are high and it is doing all it can to minimise the impact. India has, tongue in cheek, called for a "de-escalation", giving the same advice to warring parties which it received during Operation Sindoor from many parts of the world, asking India and Pakistan to de-escalate. It was a case of equating the aggressor and the aggrieved. It matters no more to the world, whether one is right or wrong or whether international law or territorial integrity have been violated, as long as the warring sides "de-escalate".





### Current situation in West Asia:

- Iran's nuclear threat has been neutralized.
- Israel is now the only nuclear power in the region.
- The U.S. has around 40,000 troops and strong military presence in West Asia.
- Israel and the U.S. aim to fully dismantle Iran's influence in the region (including groups supported by Iran in Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza).
- Only the Houthis in Yemen and some militias in Iraq still remain active.



### Why did the Gulf countries support this?

- They feared Iran as much as, or more than, Israel.
- Iran's growing power and ideology made them nervous.
- So they aligned more closely with the U.S. and Israel.
- They are also working to improve relations with Israel (e.g., Abraham Accords).

### Iran's response:

- Iran fired missiles at U.S. military bases in **Qatar and Iraq** in retaliation.
- It claimed the number of missiles was equal to the bombs dropped by the U.S.
- This created a dangerous situation, especially as Iran attacked a fellow Muslim country (Qatar).

### Bigger picture for Iran:

- Iran sees this as a threat to its very existence.
- It believes the real goal of the U.S. and Israel is regime change — to remove the religious government.
- There is no ready alternative to replace the current regime, so a collapse could lead to chaos like in Iraq or Libya.
- That could fuel more terrorism and instability in the region.

### Also,

- The U.S. surprisingly announced a ceasefire between Israel and Iran.

Iran can now say it retaliated and not look weak.

Israel was also hurt, though Western media downplayed it.

### Another crisis is coming ?

- Israel's Prime Minister now politically stronger, is pushing to annex Gaza and the West Bank.
- His goal is to realize the dream of "Greater Israel" with no Palestinian territories.
- Most resistance to Israel's plan has been crushed.
- The U.S. seems to support this vision.

### What does this mean for Palestinians?

- If annexation happens, Israel may become an apartheid state where Palestinians have fewer rights.
- Or it would need to offer full citizenship to Palestinians, which is unlikely.
- Gulf leaders have largely stopped pushing for a Palestinian state, focusing more on peace with Israel for stability and economic benefits.







## The need for gender equity in urban bureaucracy

# The need for gender equity in urban bureaucracy

India is in the midst of a profound urban transformation. By 2050, over 800 million people, about half the population, will live in cities, making India the largest driver of global urban growth. As cities expand spatially, economically and demographically, they are rewriting the social contract of a modern India and shaping the future of its democracy and development.

In the last three decades, progressive constitutional reforms have advanced gender equity. The 73rd and 74th Amendments mandate 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Governments (ULGs), further strengthened to 50% by 17 States and a Union Territory. Today, women comprise over 46% of local elected representatives (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2024), as a rising presence of mayors and councillors.

However, the bureaucratic apparatus that implements their decisions remains overwhelmingly male. While women's representation in grass-root politics has increased, administrative cadres (city managers, planners, engineers, police) exhibit a stark imbalance, limiting the ability of cities to respond equitably to all citizens. As we invest in highways, metros, and smart cities, we overlook a foundational aspect of inclusive development – gender equity in bureaucracy.

### The bureaucratic gender gap

Despite more women entering the civil services, the urban administrative architecture remains male-dominated. As of 2022, women constituted just 20% of the Indian Administrative Service (IndiaSpend-2022), with even lower representation in urban planning, municipal engineering and transport authorities. In policing, only 11.7% of the national force are women (Bureau of Police Research and Development-2023), and often confined to desk roles.

This gap is cause for concern. In cities, the engagement of women is different. They rely more on public transport, make multi-stop journeys for work and caregiving, and depend on neighbourhood-level infrastructure. An Institute



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In India, while women's representation in grass-roots politics has increased, administrative cadres tell a different story

for Transportation and Development Policy and Safetipin study found that 84% of women in Delhi and Mumbai used public or shared transport; it was 63% for men. Yet, urban planning prioritises mega-projects over safe, accessible, neighbourhood-level mobility. A 2019 Safetipin audit across 50 cities found over 60% of public spaces were poorly lit. With few women in policing, community safety initiatives often fail to resonate with women.

This underrepresentation is not superficial; it affects outcomes. Women officials bring perspectives shaped by lived realities. Studies by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations and UN Women show that they prioritise water, health and safety, and improve public trust in law enforcement through empathetic enforcement. Gender-sensitive design requires gender-diverse institutions.

### Missed opportunity in gender budgeting

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), which integrates gender considerations into public finance, is a promising but underutilised tool in India's urban governance. Introduced globally in the 1990s, GRB recognises that budgets are not neutral and can reinforce inequities if left unchecked.

India adopted a Gender Budget Statement in 2005-06, with Delhi, Tamil Nadu and Kerala leading efforts. Delhi has funded women-only buses and public lighting; Tamil Nadu applied GRB across 64 departments in 2022-23, and Kerala embedded gender goals through its People's Plan Campaign. Yet, studies by UN-Women and the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy show that most such efforts suffer from weak monitoring and limited institutional capacities, especially in smaller cities. For many ULGs, GRB remains tokenistic, overlooking essentials such as pedestrian safety or childcare in urban planning.

In contrast, countries such as the Philippines mandate 5% of local budgets for gender programmes; Rwanda integrates GRB into national planning with oversight bodies; Uganda mandates gender equity certificates for fund approvals; Mexico ties GRB to results-based

budgeting; and South Africa pilots participatory planning to anchor GRB in lived realities. These are not just fiscal reforms but also a reimagining of citizen-centric governance in cities.

Building inclusive cities requires moving beyond political quotas to ensure women's presence in bureaucracy. This demands systemic reforms in recruitment, retention and promotion across administrative and technical roles. Affirmative action, through quotas and scholarships in planning and engineering, is key to dismantling structural barriers.

Globally, countries as varied as Rwanda, Brazil, and South Korea show the impact of representation. Rwanda boosted maternal health and education spending; Brazil prioritised sanitation and primary health care; South Korea's gender impact assessments reshaped transit and public spaces and Tunisia's parity laws gave women more technical roles, improving focus on safety and health. The Philippines uses gender-tagged budgeting to fund gender-based violence shelters and childcare. Gender-balanced bureaucracies are not about fairness alone. They are essential for building safer, equitable, responsive cities.

### The cities we deserve

As India aspires to become a \$5 trillion economy, its cities must also aspire to be more than economic growth engines. They must become spaces of inclusion and equity. Gender must be mainstreamed into planning and implementation through mandatory audits, participatory budgeting, and linked evaluation. GRB should be institutionalised across ULGs, supported by targeted capacity-building.

Representation must also translate into agency, and help dismantle glass ceilings. Local gender equity councils and models such as Kudumbashree offer templates, especially for small and transitioning cities. Women are already reshaping governance as elected leaders. They must now shape how cities are planned, serviced and governed. When cities reflect women's lived experiences, they work better for all. To build cities for women, we must start by building cities with women.

**By 2050, over 800 million Indians will live in cities — about half of the population.**

**This makes India the largest driver of global urban growth.**

**Cities are reshaping India's democracy, development, and society.**

### Progress in Women's Political Representation

- **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments** mandated **33% reservation** for women in local governments.
- **17 states and one Union Territory** increased this to **50%.**
- As of 2024, **women make up over 46%** of local elected representatives.
- Women are increasingly present as **mayors and councillors.**

### But Bureaucratic Gender Gap !

- Despite more women in politics, **urban bureaucracy remains male-dominated.**
- In 2022:
  - ◆ Only **20% of IAS officers** were women.
  - ◆ **Urban planning, municipal engineering, and transport** have even fewer women.
  - ◆ **Police force:** Only **11.7%** are women, mostly in desk jobs.





## Why This Matters ?

- Women use cities differently:
  - ♦ Depend more on **public and shared transport**. (84% of women in Delhi and Mumbai used public/shared transport, compared to 63% of men.)
  - ♦ Make **multiple short trips** for work and caregiving.
  - ♦ Women at decision making level focus more on **water, health, safety**.
  - ♦ Improve **public trust** through empathetic governance.
- Yet, urban planning often ignores these needs, focusing on large infrastructure instead of neighbourhood-level mobility.
- A 2019 Safetipin audit of 50 cities showed **over 60% of public spaces** were **poorly lit**. Few women in **policing** weakens community safety efforts.

## Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB):

GRB considers **gender needs in government budgets**.

- India adopted a **Gender Budget Statement in 2005-06**.
  - ♦ **Delhi**: Women-only buses, better lighting.
  - ♦ **Tamil Nadu**: GRB in 64 departments (2022–23).
  - ♦ **Kerala**: Used GRB in its **People's Plan Campaign**.

## Problems with GRB in India

- **Weak monitoring, limited capacities**, especially in smaller cities.
- Often **tokenistic**, missing basics like **pedestrian safety** and **childcare**.

## What India Needs to Do ? (Solution)

### Increase Women in Urban Bureaucracy

- Go beyond political representation.
- Reform **recruitment, promotion, and training** systems.
- Use **quotas and scholarships** to bring women into technical roles.

Urban growth must focus not just on GDP but also on **inclusion and equality**.

Cities should use: **Mandatory gender audits, Participatory budgeting and Linked evaluation systems**

**Gender budgeting** should be standard in all **Urban Local Governments (ULGs)**.

Support through **training and capacity building** is essential.





## Nuclear spectre

A 12-day war between Israel and Iran, sparked by Israel's "pre-emptive" strikes on Iran's nuclear sites, has ended in a ceasefire.

These attacks, backed by the U.S., **ignored the risks of radioactive leaks and violated international norms, targeting a country that is a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)** and had subjected its program to international scrutiny.

### Nuclear spectre

Israeli and U.S. actions against Iran  
amount to nuclear brinkmanship

**A**fter a 12-day intense missile barrage and air attacks following Israel's illegal aerial attacks on Iran, the two countries finally announced a ceasefire on Tuesday. Ostensibly conducted as a "pre-emptive" strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, the Israeli attacks graduated into a full-fledged war that also involved U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear installations. These attacks, in blithely ignoring the dangers of radioactive leakage, and their subsequent responses, point to the stark nature of a fragile international order now threatened by escalating nuclear risks from West Asia to Ukraine and even the Indian subcontinent. The attacks on Iran might have damaged its nuclear installations and, in particular, its uranium enrichment capabilities. Yet, this naked aggression was against a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and a country that had willingly subjected its facilities to international scrutiny. Iran had also signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with the P5+1 (nuclear-armed states plus Germany) to ensure that its nuclear capabilities remained peaceful, only for it to be rendered meaningless after the U.S. withdrew from it during President Donald Trump's first term. These attacks now create a new dynamic, wherein Iran is compelled to seek nuclear weapons by withdrawing from its commitments – its parliament is now mulling a bill to exit the NPT – and use them as a deterrent. Meanwhile, any step Iran takes to do so could be used to justify further aggression by Israel and the U.S., thereby rejecting international laws and the NPT's nonproliferation norm.

This aggression may now push Iran to **exit the NPT** and pursue nuclear weapons for deterrence, creating a **dangerous feedback loop** where any such move by Iran could be used to justify more attacks.

Meanwhile, **Israel, which has nuclear weapons but is not an NPT member**, faces no accountability, exposing double standards in global nuclear policy.

These developments, alongside **Russia's nuclear threats in Ukraine**, show how global nuclear order is breaking down.

With nuclear powers expanding their arsenals and other countries considering nuclear weapons for security, **the risk of global nuclear conflict is rising.**

Without renewed diplomacy and a commitment to disarmament, the world faces a **new, more dangerous era of nuclear brinkmanship**, potentially worse than during the Cold War.







## For first time, India breaks into top 100 in global SDG rankings

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The index measures overall progress toward achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015; India takes 99th rank, up from 109

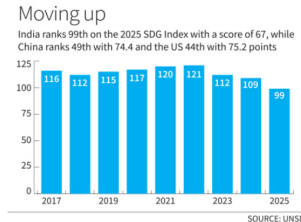
Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

India has, for the first time, secured a position among the top 100 countries in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index, ranking 99th out of 167 nations in the 2025 edition of the Sustainable Development Report (SDR), released on Tuesday by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

The latest report places India with a score of 67 on the SDG Index, a significant improvement from its 109th rank in 2024. China is ranked 49th with a score of 74.4, while the United States stands at 44th with 75.2 points.

The index measures overall progress toward achieving the 17 SDGs adopted by United Nations member states in 2015, with a score of 100 indicating full achievement of all goals.

Among India's neighbours, Bhutan ranks 74th (70.5), Nepal 85th (68.6), Bangladesh 114th (63.9),



and Pakistan 140th (57). Maritime neighbours Maldives and Sri Lanka stand at 53rd and 93rd places respectively.

The report noted that since the adoption of the SDGs, India has steadily improved its standing: it ranked 112th in 2023, 121st in 2022, and 120th in 2021.

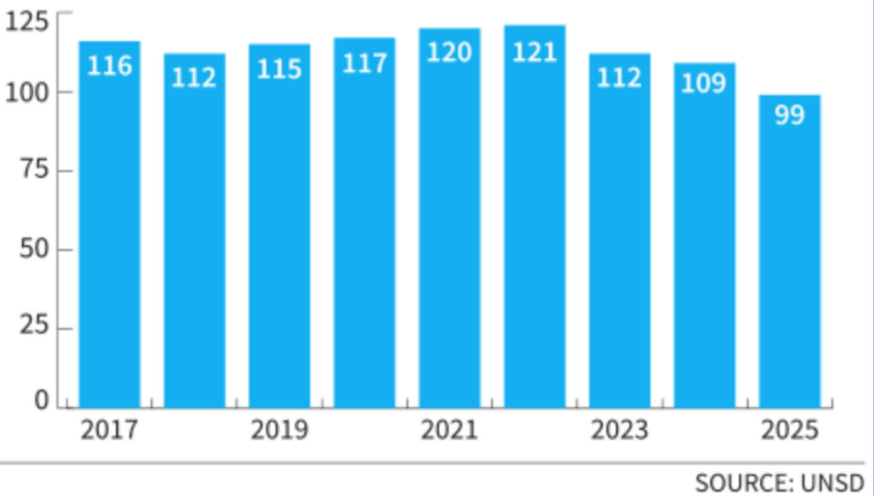
Despite India's gains, the report flagged that global progress on the SDGs has largely stalled. "Only 17 per cent of the SDG targets are on track to be achieved by 2030," it stated, attributing this to "conflicts, structural vulnerabilities, and limited fiscal space" in many regions.

The SDR, authored by a team led by economist Jeffrey Sachs, pointed to continued dominance by European nations on the index. Finland, Sweden and Denmark hold the top three positions, with 19 of the top 20 countries located in Europe.

However, even these nations are facing challenges related to climate change and biodiversity due to unsustainable consumption patterns.

## Moving up

India ranks 99th on the 2025 SDG Index with a score of 67, while China ranks 49th with 74.4 and the US 44th with 75.2 points



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