

TRACING IRAN'S POWER PYRAMID: RISE OF THE SUPREME LEADER

The assassination of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's 86-year-old Supreme Leader, marks the end of a defining era in the country's post-1979 Islamic Revolution leadership. He was killed in an attack by US and Israeli forces.

Following his death, the constitutional process to appoint a successor was immediately activated. The Assembly of Experts has begun deliberations to select the next Supreme Leader.

In the interim, a three-member **Interim Leadership Council** has taken over his duties, as provided under Iran's Constitution. These developments highlight the structured mechanisms within Iran's political system to manage leadership transitions during crises.

Religion and Politics in Iran: Historical Roots

- The close relationship between religion and politics in Shia-majority Iran predates the 1979 Islamic Revolution.
- Shia clerics often adopted an anti-monarchist stance and actively participated in political movements.
- Important examples include:
 - the **19th-century Tobacco Movement** against British concessions,
 - the **Constitutional Revolution of 1906–11** demanding a constitutional monarchy,
 - protests against the Shah's **1963 White Revolution reforms**, and
 - finally the 1979 Revolution.
- **The 1979 Revolution and Clerical Leadership**
 - The ideological leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, even while he was in exile in France, played a decisive role in shaping the 1979 Revolution and the Islamic Republic that followed.
 - Although diverse groups such as workers and communists joined the anti-Shah protests, the religious establishment gained greater legitimacy and influence after the Revolution due to its strong ideological direction.
- **Mosques as Political Spaces**

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- One key factor behind the clergy's rise was the central role of mosques in political mobilisation. Friday prayer gatherings became important platforms for religio-political expression.
- In a repressive environment where public spaces were monitored by the Shah's secret police, SAVAK, mosques functioned as relatively safe spaces (bast) for organising resistance.

Iran After the Supreme Leader

- Iran has regularly held elections for the **President, the Majlis (Parliament)**, and local bodies. Politics has long been shaped by rivalry between reformists and hardliners.
 - Ayatollah Khamenei, though often supportive of hardliners, developed a practice of balancing factions and managing internal differences.
 - His religious decree (fatwa) against nuclear weapons and his approval of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) showed a mix of ideology and pragmatism in state policy.
 - **Role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)**
 - The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), created after the 1979 Revolution, became a key pillar of the regime.
 - Beyond defending the revolution internally, it expanded Iran's regional influence by supporting groups such as Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon.
 - Khamenei regarded the IRGC as central to maintaining political stability.
 - **Growing Gap Between State and Society**
 - Years of sanctions and international isolation have strained Iran's economy. Many citizens have demanded greater political participation and accountability.
 - This has created a widening gap between public expectations and the state's performance.
 - Economic hardships and political restrictions have intensified domestic dissatisfaction.
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HORMUZ HALT: INDIA EYES HIGHER RUSSIAN OIL IMPORTS

- Around 2.5–2.7 million barrels per day of India’s crude imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz. This accounts for nearly **half of India’s total oil imports**, mainly from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait.
- India is the world’s third-largest crude oil consumer and imports over 88% of its oil needs. A large share of its gas consumption also depends on imports from West Asia through the Strait.
- **Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz**
 - The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow waterway between Iran and Oman connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea.
 - It is the world’s most critical oil transit chokepoint, handling about one-fifth of global petroleum and LNG trade.
 - Following messages from Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps claiming closure of the Strait, many traders, insurers, and shipping companies suspended shipments to avoid conflict risks.

Russian Crude as an Alternative

- With Hormuz shipments disrupted, India may turn to Russian oil. Russian crude is available in significant volumes in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, including in floating storage.
- **Changing Import Patterns**
 - India imported about 1.1 million barrels per day of Russian crude in February, lower than the 2025 peak of over 2 million barrels per day.
 - Loadings for Indian ports, which averaged 1.7 million barrels per day last year, fell to 0.7 million barrels per day in February.
 - This earlier reduction in Russian imports has now created room for a possible increase if supply from the Strait of Hormuz remains disrupted.

India's Immediate Energy Cushion

- Indian refiners currently hold more than 10 days of crude oil inventories and about a week's worth of fuel stocks.
- In addition, roughly a week's supply of crude is available in India's strategic petroleum reserves.
- These buffers provide short-term protection against sudden supply disruptions.
- **Alternative Sourcing Options**
 - To manage potential shortages, India can draw from strategic reserves and accelerate spot purchases from non-Hormuz regions.
 - Alternative suppliers include the United States, West Africa, Latin America, and Russia.
 - Russian crude available in nearby waters, including floating storage, offers immediate flexibility if Middle Eastern imports are constrained.
- **Risk Depends on Duration of Disruption**
 - The overall impact on India will depend on how long the Strait of Hormuz remains disrupted. Most experts believe a prolonged blockade is unlikely.
 - However, the longer the disruption continues, the greater the effect on global energy markets and domestic fuel prices.

LPG and LNG: Key Vulnerabilities

- LPG is India's biggest vulnerability. The country imports 80–85% of its LPG needs, mostly from Gulf suppliers through Hormuz.
- Unlike crude oil, India does not maintain large strategic LPG reserves, making supplies more sensitive to disruption.
- Similarly, around 60% of India's LNG imports pass through the Strait. Structural buffers for LNG are limited, and spot cargo availability is relatively thin.
- In the event of a prolonged closure of Hormuz, securing LPG and LNG supplies could become more challenging than crude oil.

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NUCLEIC ACID TEST (NAT) FOR BLOOD TRANSFUSION

- The matter came before a Bench of the Chief Justice of India and two other judges after a petition was filed by an NGO seeking mandatory implementation of NAT across blood banks in India.
- The petitioner argued that the right to safe blood transfusion forms part of the fundamental right to life under **Article 21 of the Constitution**.
- The plea emphasised that NAT is a safer and more sensitive testing mechanism compared to existing screening methods and is necessary to prevent transfusion-transmitted infections.
- The Court has asked the petitioner to submit additional data on cost-effectiveness, State-level implementation, and feasibility before taking a final view.

What is the Nucleic Acid Test (NAT)?

- NAT is a highly sensitive molecular diagnostic technique that detects the genetic material (DNA or RNA) of viruses in donated blood.
- It is capable of identifying infections such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C.
- Unlike traditional serological tests, NAT reduces the “window period”, the time between infection and detectability, thereby enhancing blood safety.
- Currently, many blood banks in India primarily use **Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA)** tests, which are less expensive but comparatively less sensitive during early infection stages.

Constitutional Dimension and Right to Life

- The petitioner has argued that access to safe and infection-free blood is an integral component of the right to life under Article 21.
- The Supreme Court has previously interpreted Article 21 expansively to include the right to health, medical care, and dignity.

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- In this context, ensuring safe blood transfusion aligns with the constitutional obligation of the State to protect public health.
- The Court's decision to examine the issue indicates recognition of the broader public health and human rights implications.

Cost and Feasibility Concerns

- During the hearing, the Bench raised questions regarding the financial feasibility of making NAT mandatory across all States.
- The Court asked whether economically weaker States, already struggling with budgetary constraints, would be able to afford NAT in government blood banks and hospitals.
- While the petitioner argued that the costs of NAT are comparatively low, the Court highlighted that additional financial burdens could affect States with limited fiscal capacity.
- The Bench has directed the petitioner to file an affidavit detailing:
 - Whether State hospitals currently use NAT
 - In how many hospitals is it implemented
 - The States where it is operational

Policy and Regulatory Framework

- Blood safety in India is regulated under the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940**, and supervised by the **National Blood Transfusion Council (NBTC)** and **State Blood Transfusion Councils**.
 - Currently, mandatory screening includes tests for HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, malaria, and syphilis using serological methods. NAT is not uniformly mandated across all blood banks.
 - Introducing compulsory NAT would require:
 - Infrastructure upgrades
 - Skilled laboratory personnel
 - Increased financial allocation
 - Standardisation across public and private sectors
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RESETTING INDIA–CANADA RELATIONS - URANIUM DEAL AND CEPA NEGOTIATIONS

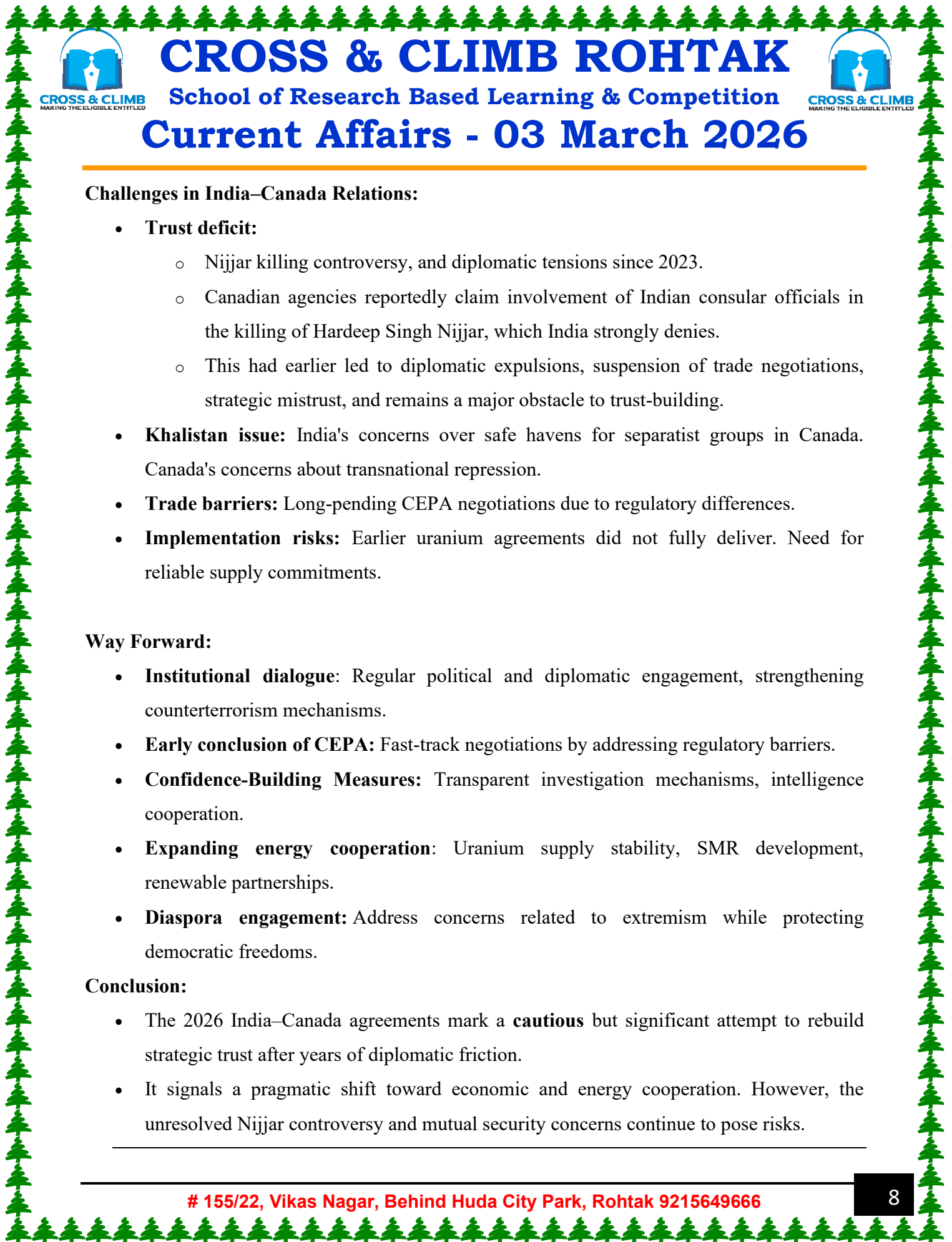
- India and Canada have taken significant steps to reset strained bilateral relations during the recent **visit** of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney **to India**.
- Talks with the Indian PM focused on **rebuilding strategic trust**, enhancing economic ties, and strengthening cooperation in energy and security.
- The visit marks the **first** full bilateral Canadian Prime Ministerial visit since Justin Trudeau’s 2018 trip and comes after relations deteriorated following the 2023 diplomatic dispute over the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar.
- Leaders also discussed escalating conflict in West Asia. India emphasised peace and stability, diplomacy and dialogue, however, no joint position was announced.

Strategic Significance for India:

- **Economic importance:** Access to critical minerals, energy resources, and advanced technologies.
- **Energy security:** Reliable uranium supply for nuclear energy expansion.
- **Climate goals:** Nuclear and renewable cooperation supports **low-carbon growth**.
- **Indo-Pacific strategy:** Strengthens ties with a key **G7 partner**.

India–Canada Relations:

- Canada and India share over 75 years of diplomatic relations, which were formally designated as a “Strategic Partnership” in 2018.
- India is Canada’s **largest** source country for most immigration categories, with over **1.8 million** (including over 425,000 Indian students) people of Indian origin—nearly 4% of its population—significantly influencing the nation's culture, economy, and politics.
- **Key exports** from India to Canada (\$4.22 billion) include drugs & pharmaceuticals, iron & steel, seafood, cotton garments, electronic goods and chemicals among others.
- **Key imports** of India from Canada (\$4.44 billion) include pulses, pearls & semiprecious stones, coal, fertilizer, paper and petroleum crude.



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Challenges in India–Canada Relations:

- **Trust deficit:**
 - Nijjar killing controversy, and diplomatic tensions since 2023.
 - Canadian agencies reportedly claim involvement of Indian consular officials in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, which India strongly denies.
 - This had earlier led to diplomatic expulsions, suspension of trade negotiations, strategic mistrust, and remains a major obstacle to trust-building.
- **Khalistan issue:** India's concerns over safe havens for separatist groups in Canada. Canada's concerns about transnational repression.
- **Trade barriers:** Long-pending CEPA negotiations due to regulatory differences.
- **Implementation risks:** Earlier uranium agreements did not fully deliver. Need for reliable supply commitments.

Way Forward:

- **Institutional dialogue:** Regular political and diplomatic engagement, strengthening counterterrorism mechanisms.
- **Early conclusion of CEPA:** Fast-track negotiations by addressing regulatory barriers.
- **Confidence-Building Measures:** Transparent investigation mechanisms, intelligence cooperation.
- **Expanding energy cooperation:** Uranium supply stability, SMR development, renewable partnerships.
- **Diaspora engagement:** Address concerns related to extremism while protecting democratic freedoms.

Conclusion:

- The 2026 India–Canada agreements mark a **cautious** but significant attempt to rebuild strategic trust after years of diplomatic friction.
 - It signals a pragmatic shift toward economic and energy cooperation. However, the unresolved Nijjar controversy and mutual security concerns continue to pose risks.
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WHAT IS OLEUM?



- Oleum is a powerful **chemical solution** composed of **sulfur trioxide (SO_3)** dissolved in **sulfuric acid (H_2SO_4)**.
- Though **oleum and sulfuric acid** are closely related, they **differ significantly in composition and reactivity**.
 - **Sulfuric acid (H_2SO_4)** is a **powerful acid** in its own right, but **oleum** is even **more reactive due to the additional dissolved SO_3** .
 - The **Contact Process** is the **primary industrial method for producing sulfuric acid, and by extension, oleum**.
- Oleum is available in different concentrations, with the **SO_3 content varying to suit industrial needs**.
- It's often referred to as **“fuming sulfuric acid”** due to its **tendency to release SO_3 fumes upon exposure to air**.
- In terms of appearance, oleum ranges from **colorless to pale yellow**, with an **oily consistency**.
- **Applications:**
 - Oleum's **high reactivity** makes it a **vital component for producing highly concentrated sulfuric acid** and in **synthesizing crucial chemicals like explosives, dyes, and pharmaceuticals**.
 - Oleum's **high viscosity** contributes to its **“oily” appearance** and influences its handling requirements in industrial applications.
 - It is also an **efficient dehydrating agent** and can **strip water from organic compounds**, which is essential in certain industrial reactions.
- **Is Oleum Dangerous?**
 - It is **highly corrosive**, meaning it can **burn and damage skin, eyes, and other materials very quickly**.
 - Because it **releases toxic fumes**, it can also be **harmful if inhaled**.