











# Tehran Crisis: Indian Students, Citizens Advised To Leave AS Conflict Escalates

Amid the rapidly intensifying conflict between Israel and Iran, the Indian Embassy in Tehran has issued a fresh and urgent advisory for all Indian nationals and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) residing in the Iranian capital. The advisory follows a public appeal by U.S. President Donald Trump, who has called for the immediate evacuation of Tehran due to ongoing Israeli airstrikes and the threat of further escalation. The embassy has urged all Indians in Tehran who are able to leave using their own means to relocate to safer areas outside the city without delay. Those who have not yet been in touch with the Indian Embassy are requested to immediately share their location and contact details. Emergency contact information has been shared to ensure swift communication and assistance: cial arrangements are being made to support Indian students and other vulnerable groups. The embassy is actively helping them move to safer regions within Iran and is also exploring further evacuation options

based on the evolving situation. Meanwhile, all Indian citizens in Iran have been advised to remain extremely cautious, avoid unnecessary travel, and strictly follow local safety protocols and official advisories. President Trump, who left the G7 summit in Canada early due to the crisis, posted a stark warning on social media urging people to evacuate Tehran "immediately." His statement cited the continuation of Israeli strikes targeting Iranian cities and raised alarm about a possible escalation that could widen the conflict. The military exchanges between Israel and Iran have included both missile and drone attacks, with Tehran facing some of the most intense strikes in recent days. In response to the deteriorating situation, the Indian government has begun relocating its nationals from high-risk areas. Armenia has emerged as a possible evacuation route after Iran permitted land travel to neighboring countries despite the closure of its airspace. The first group of Indian nationals is expect-



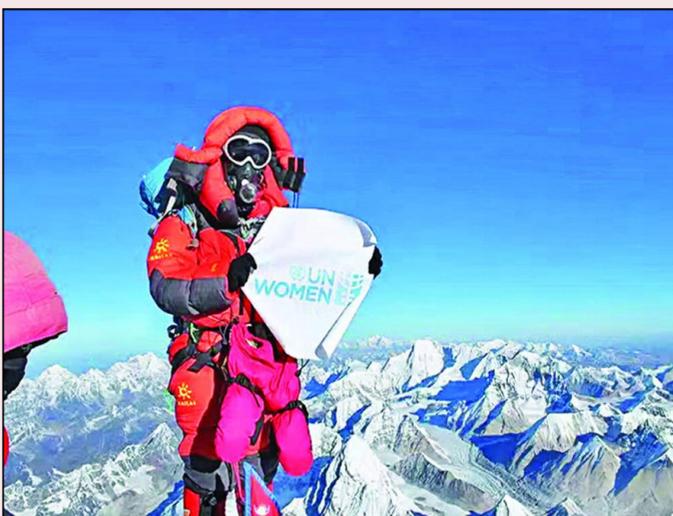
ed to cross into Armenia soon, as part of the initial phase of India's emergency relocation effort. The Ministry of External Affairs is closely monitoring developments and maintaining continuous contact with the Indian community in Iran. It is also coordinating with Iranian authorities and neighboring countries to ensure a safe and orderly

evacuation process if needed. Indian citizens in Iran are urged to stay connected with the embassy and follow all advisories to ensure their safety during this volatile period. The advisory highlights the growing seriousness of the security situation in Tehran and the need for urgent precautions as the conflict in West Asia escalates.

# Gender, Grit, and Altitude

## Women on Everest Rewrite the Rules of Risk, Leadership, and Sustainability

Some recent news stories highlighted that Mt. Everest peak is set to be reached by women thousandth time. However, the claim stands contested, as it has been argued that several women mountaineers scaled the peak successfully many times, like Lhakpa Sherpa, from Nepal, who did it ten times, a record for female climbers. However, according to the Himalayan Database, which tracks expeditions to the top of Everest, women climbers had scaled the peak 962 times, while men did so 11,955 times by the end of May 2025. While mountains are said to be conquered and narrated by men' (Majastre 2009). 'Mountaineering landscapes have evolved as, and remain strongly masculinised concepts, and it has been, and still is, male-dominated' (Pomfret and Doran, 2015), and 'women mountaineers' continue to be marginalised by the overwhelming maleness of popularised mountaineering' (Hunt, 2019). No wonder that essentially masculine leadership traits shaped perceptions of who can succeed in a mountaineering space (Barratt 2010; Robinson 2008), and mountaineering leadership programmes have been imbued with a 'culture of competition, confidence, strength, toughness and proving worth' (Sharp, 2001). As a result, 'female mountaineering suffered structural oppression within that culture'. Nevertheless, the ratio of women getting to the top of the Everest is on the rise, which was one to 16 men in the 2000s, and two decades later, it is one to 10. In India, too, as of December 2024, 74 women scaled Mount Everest, among them were Arunima Sinha, the first female amputee, and very recently, Chhonzin Angmo, the first visually impaired woman. Undoubtedly, under-representation has placed many aspiring women at a disadvantage as they fail to look up to role models for inspiration. Women mountaineers on climbing expeditions, also face practical difficulties with ill-fitted mountaineering outfits and equipment, generally



designed for men, which not only cause discomfort and injuries, but also psychological handicaps such as 'self-doubt and anxiety about their abilities, which considerably influence their risk perception, and decision-making in challenging climbing situations'. While, Billi Bierling, Director, of Himalayan Database, who herself climbed Everest in 2009, commented that 'when it comes to taking risks on the mountain, women are probably a little bit more conservative... if it is too dangerous, she won't take chances and go down, while a male climber, would still go'. However, a 2018 study (Dr Jenny Hall, York St John University, UK), contended that in an essentially masculinised environment, women mountaineers created a 'place of difference while negotiating risk, amounting to the legitimate 'other' forms of mountaineering. While gendered experiences of mountaineering offered insights into different ways of confronting 'fear as a tactical emotion to negotiate positionality and coping strategies while experiencing risk', women mountaineers displayed unique qualities of leadership like cooperation, emotion, personal development, consensual decision-making and being relationship orientated. However, such differing traits have been often interpreted as

their 'insufficient physical strength to endure the challenges of hard mountaineering' (Sharp). While research in leisure studies and effectual geographies exploring women's experience in extreme sports like mountaineering is limited, particularly, in terms of how to effect influences the sentient and emotional behaviours of women (Humberstone 2016; Warren 2016; Waitt and Clifton 2013; Evers 2004, 2006, 2009). Yet, there is a persistent belief that 'gender is consequential in adventure tourism'. The void in such scholarship demonstrates an emphasis on masculinity in the high-altitude mountaineering' (Eger et al., 2021). A 2020 study that examined the empowering benefits of constraint negotiation for women mountaineers, reiterated that the 'mountaineering space was used to resist gendered expectations and gaining empowerment' (Harris & Wilson, 2007; Little & Wilson, 2005). Analysing responses from 321 female mountaineers, it dismissed the contention that 'women are passive victims of constraints', rather 'they are active agents, motivated to pursue mountaineering aspirations despite having identified barriers'. As in the wave of social transformation in the 20th century, the sporting milieu and mountain activities got feminised (Galissaire, Mennesson, 2004), a comparative study of 2,211 climbers making their first attempt on Everest between 1990 and 2005, and of 5,324 climbers between 2006-2019, revealed that the summit success rates have almost doubled, both, for men and women, from 32.7 per cent of 214 women and 32.9 per cent of 1,702 men to 68.2 per cent of 548 women

and 64.4 per cent of 2,860 men (Himalayan Database). Between 2006 and 2019, only 0.5 per cent of 548 women vs. 1.1 per cent of 2,860 men attempting Everest did not return home alive, which led to the conclusion that 'women are more likely to reach the summit and less likely to die'. Now adventure tourism market which includes mountaineering has been projected to reach USD 345.6 Billion this year and is expected to expand to USD 745.7 Billion by 2035, representing a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8 per cent from 2025 to 2035. India is also slated to grow with a CAGR of 8 per cent during the period, and the tourism economy is targeted to reach USD 3 Trillion by 2047. While, women, both, as mountaineers and inhabitants of mountainous regions, could contribute significantly to micro and macro economies. As primary managers of mountain resources and participants in local economies, particularly in agriculture, animal husbandry, and tourism, they play a vital role in generating local livelihoods and ensuring food security and biodiversity. Labour market activities like arranging homestays, crafts, and guiding will also have a broader impact on the country's overall development. Women as mountaineers can boost entrepreneurship by promoting eco-friendly mountain-related industries, sustainable tourism models, and high-altitude scientific research. As many environmentalists and development economists red-flagged the issue of the 'commodification' of mountains, International Mountain Day 2024, rightly focused on mountain solutions for a sustainable future. While, the UN Environment, Executive Director, Erik Solheim, highlighted the role of 'women in protecting the mountain ecosystems'. Since, mountains form the most vulnerable part of the natural ecosystem, women with adequate financial and institutional support could act as change agents in building up sustainable economy and ecosystems.

# Ambedkar Photo Controversy: A Turning Point In BJP-RJD Battle For Bihar Election

In Bihar's volatile political climate, even a birthday can turn into a battlefield. In June 2025, a video from RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav's 78th birthday celebration sparked widespread anger after a portrait of Dr B R Ambedkar was seen placed near his feet. The image, seen by many as disrespectful to the Dalit icon and architect of the Indian Constitution, snowballed into a full-blown controversy just months before the state assembly elections. The Bharatiya Janata Party wasted no time in capitalising on the video. The party's leaders across the state and at the Centre accused Lalu and the RJD of insulting Dalit sentiments and showing disregard for Ambedkar's legacy. Union Ministers and Bihar's Deputy Chief

Minister demanded an apology and described the act as unpardonable. The outrage resonated with Dalit groups, many of whom voiced their anger online and at grassroots meetings. The Bihar State Scheduled Caste Commission issued a notice to Lalu, warning of potential legal action under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. The BJP maintained that the episode reflects the RJD's symbolic rather than sincere commitment to Ambedkar's ideals. As public anger simmered, the party used the controversy to position itself as the true custodian of Dalit pride, highlighting its efforts to build Ambedkar memorials and implement pro-Dalit policies across the country. Tejashwi Yadav and senior RJD

leaders responded by accusing the BJP of politicising an innocent moment and pointed to Lalu's past contributions to promoting Ambedkar's ideology in Bihar. Subash Yadav, Lalu's brother-in-law, blamed the supporter who placed the photo and said it was not Lalu's fault. Senior leader Manoj Jha dismissed the outrage as political posturing. However, the damage was done. The BJP kept the narrative alive, questioning whether someone who truly respected Ambedkar would allow such a lapse in protocol. The saffron party continued its Dalit outreach, hoping to erode RJD's support among the community, especially in rural and semi-urban constituencies. What could have passed as a minor oversight has now



become a defining episode in Bihar's election season. And while RJD calls it a political hit job, the BJP has successfully turned it into a campaign talking point, framing itself as the party that doesn't just speak of Ambedkar but truly defends his honour.

# Green Gold: India's Horticultural Leap into the Bioeconomy

Horticulture is a key catalyst to fuel a circular, green economy through its rich biodiversity, vast rural base, and untapped innovation potential. This transformation is not just an economic opportunity; it is a national imperative for sustainable prosperity. India stands at a pivotal moment in its developmental journey, where the convergence of science, sustainability, and sectoral innovation is redefining traditional agriculture and horticulture. Among the most promising shifts is the rise of the bioeconomy, which encompasses the production of renewable biological resources and their conversion into value-added products such as food, bioenergy, biochemicals, and bio-based materials. The Indian bioeconomy has expanded remarkably, from USD 10 billion in 2014 to an estimated USD 165.7 billion in 2024, and is projected to reach USD 300 billion by 2030, according to the India Bioeconomy Report (2024). This remarkable growth is not merely a consequence of technological advancement; it reflects a strategic redirection towards climate resilience, ecological sustainability, and economic inclusivity. India's horticulture sector, being the world's second-largest producer of fruits and vegetables and pioneer in the production of plantation crops, spices, medicinal and aromatic plants and floriculture, is uniquely positioned to anchor this bio-economic transformation. Horticulture offers not only the biological raw material base for a wide spectrum of bio-based industries but also the potential to deliver income diversification, rural employment, and nutritional security. As such, aligning horticultural development with the principles of a circular bioeconomy presents a timely and transformative opportunity for the country.

## Bioeconomic Powerhouse

The bioeconomy in horticulture extends well beyond the conventional practices of growing fruits, vegetables, and other crops. It involves the integration of biotechnology, bio-resource management, and value chain optimisation to develop products ranging from nutraceuticals, bioplastics, and bioenergy, to climate-resilient crop varieties. Bioconversion of post-harvest waste into compost, bio-fertilizers, or clean energy offers an opportunity to simultaneously reduce waste, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and generate additional rural incomes. India's policy landscape has begun responding to this opportunity. The launch of the BioE3 Policy (Biotechnology for Economy, Environment, and Employment) represents a significant strategic shift. This policy promotes the establishment of

advanced bio-manufacturing facilities, bio-foundry clusters, and Bio-AI hubs, all geared toward enabling lab-to-market transitions in bio-innovation. Initiatives such as the BioSaarthi mentorship program and the strengthening of biotech startup incubators have been instrumental in nurturing a vibrant ecosystem of entrepreneurship, innovation, and knowledge transfer. One of the most impactful elements of this transformation is the rapid progress in bioenergy. The ethanol blending rate in India has surged from 1.53 per cent in 2013-14 to 15 per cent in 2023-24, saving approximately ₹78,000 crore in foreign exchange and preventing the emission of 318 lakh tonnes of Carbon dioxide, according to the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (2024). This success has been driven by the development of second-generation ethanol refineries, which convert agricultural residues such as sugarcane bagasse, bamboo, and paddy straw into clean fuel, thereby reinforcing circularity and climate sustainability in rural areas. As India accelerates its transition to a low-carbon and resource-efficient economy, horticulture can be a critical driver in delivering scalable, inclusive, and market-aligned solutions within the bioeconomy framework.

## Bridging the Gaps

Despite its potential, the integration of horticulture into the bioeconomy faces several structural and operational challenges that require urgent attention. One of the most pressing issues is the infrastructure gap. Many horticultural production zones lack access to reliable cold chains, pack houses, and processing units. According to NITI Aayog (2023), post-harvest losses for perishable horticultural commodities can range from 15 to 20 per cent, primarily due to inefficient logistics, poor market access, and limited storage facilities. These losses not only reduce farmer incomes but also weaken the capacity of horticultural systems to support value addition and industrial linkage. Equally concerning is the limited extent of value addition in horticultural produce. Most fruits, vegetables, and other horticultural produce continue to be sold in raw or minimally processed forms, missing the opportunity for transformation into high-value bio-products such as bio-based packaging, plant-derived nutraceuticals, or fermented health foods. This not only restricts income potential but also prevents the sector from contributing fully to the bioeconomy's goals of waste reduction, innovation, and product diversification. Financial constraints are another barrier. Bio-based enterprises, especially those



involving new technologies or bioconversion processes, often require high initial investment, extended gestation periods, and market uncertainties. The lack of targeted financial instruments and risk-sharing mechanisms deter private sector investment, impeding the commercialisation and scaling of bio-based ventures. Moreover, the human capital base needed to power a bioeconomy is still in development. There is an urgent need for training programs and capacity-building tailored to farmers, rural entrepreneurs, processors, and women stakeholders, enabling them to adopt new technologies and participate meaningfully in bio-economic value chains. Finally, there are environmental and biodiversity risks that must be managed. Without adequate ecological safeguards, the aggressive exploitation of plant-based resources for bio-economic use may result in habitat loss, monoculture expansion, and disruption of local agro-ecological balances. As such, the growth of India's bioeconomy must be carefully regulated to ensure that it remains sustainable, resilient, and equitable.

**Strategic Interventions: Building a Resilient and Inclusive Bioeconomy** To unlock the full potential of horticulture in India's bioeconomy, a series of strategic and coordinated interventions are necessary. First and foremost, there is a need to strengthen policy and regulatory frameworks. These must be science-based, transparent, and harmonised across sectors to encourage innovation while safeguarding bio-sources and indigenous knowledge systems. Policy clarity around biosafety, intellectual property, and benefit sharing will help create a conducive environment for investment and public trust. Second, investment in infrastructure and value chains must be prioritised. Expanding rural cold chain networks, establishing decentralised processing units, and incentivising public-private partnerships for bio-manufacturing clusters can significantly reduce post-harvest losses and promote local-level value addition. Models such as Rural

Bioeconomy Parks, where processing, research, and training facilities co-exist, can serve as hubs for innovation and rural development. Third, there is a compelling need to promote innovation and skill development. Strengthening institutional support through Bio-AI hubs, biotech incubators, and mentorship programs like Bio-Saarthi can nurture a new generation of bio-entrepreneurs. Simultaneously, capacity-building programs aimed at women, youth, and marginalised farmers must be institutionalised to ensure inclusive participation in bio-economic growth. Fourth, advancing climate-smart and sustainable practices in horticulture is critical. Promoting precision farming, water-saving technologies, integrated pest and nutrient management, and climate-resilient varieties will ensure that productivity gains do not come at the expense of ecological integrity. The use of bio-inputs such as bio-pesticides and biofertilisers should be expanded, both for environmental reasons and to meet consumer demand for residue-free produce. Finally, expanding access to finance and markets is vital for scaling the bioeconomy. Dedicated Bioeconomy Investment Funds, blended finance models, and credit guarantees tailored to bio-based enterprises can mobilise private capital and reduce the burden of early-stage risk. Equally important is the need to develop robust market linkages for bio-based horticultural products, through branding, certification, export promotion, and integration into national and global supply chains.

## The Road Ahead

India's bioeconomy offers a powerful pathway to achieve economic prosperity, ecological sustainability, and social equity. The horticulture sector, by its diversity, biological richness, and economic relevance, is well-positioned to become a cornerstone of this transformation. However, realising this vision will require deliberate action, through policy coherence, institutional innovation, infrastructure development, skill empowerment, and ecological stewardship. As India moves into a decade defined by climate challenges and global sustainability commitments, a bioeconomy anchored in resilient and inclusive horticulture can not only meet domestic needs but also establish India as a global leader in green growth. By aligning scientific innovation with rural empowerment, and bio-based solutions with climate resilience, India can shape a future that is productive, equitable, and ecologically secure for generations to come.

