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SPOTLIGHT

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# 'A stranger in my capital city'

For thousands of people from the Northeast who come to Delhi seeking education and opportunity, the National Capital Region is both a place of promise and an area shadowed by prejudice

Rampant racism: A woman who had migrated from Manipur was attacked in Delhi last week when she confronted a group of boys that allegedly hurled lewd remarks at her. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Spring is Atiya's (name changed on request) favourite season. Back in Manipur, it arrives with pleasant weather, vibrant festivals, and fields bursting into colour. Since childhood, this time of the year for her has meant hours of gazing upon bright flowers and breathing in their fragrance. She hasn't experienced that for two years now, ever since she moved to Delhi.

On March 8, she walked to a garden in Malviya Nagar with a transgender friend hoping to find that spring comfort. What she encountered was just the opposite. She says a group of boys, between 13 and 16 years, began passing lewd remarks. "They began by calling me 'chinki' (a racial slur used on people with East Asian features), then went on to calling me a sex worker in Hindi," says Atiya.

The only reason Atiya says she understood these words was because they had been hurled at her several times in the past, in Delhi. When she objected, one of the boys threw a stone that struck her jaw, leaving her injured. Shocked and humiliated, she tried to run, but the boys chased her. She eventually fell to the ground, where one of them hit her with a belt, leaving bruises on her neck.

For many people from the Northeast living in Delhi, the incident was painfully familiar. While violence against communities from the region makes occasional headlines, the deeper story of racism lies in the everyday hostility — on the streets, in buses, in rented apartments, and crowded markets.

Since the incident, Atiya has kept her face covered. She walks down roads quickly and avoids venturing out after sunset. Her parents have asked her to return home, but she has decided to stay in Delhi and fight back.

**Everyday racism**

The attack on Atiya came weeks after three female students from Arunachal Pradesh were subjected to verbal abuse by their neighbours in Delhi's Malviya Nagar in late February. The furore was sparked during AC repair work in a fourth floor flat where the two of the women lived as tenants, and one was visiting. Dust from drilling fell on the lower floor and the residents heard racial slurs, abuses, and threats. Videos of the incident went viral on social media and resulted in the filing of an FIR and the arrest of the accused couple.

They were later given bail on health grounds, but the court noted that even if there was absence of physical violence, the act of the accused did not dilute the gravity of the words alleged to have been uttered.

Every year, students and job-seekers from eight States in the Northeast travel to Delhi. They say they come for opportunity — universities with wider choices, coaching centres, corporate offices, hospitals, the hospitality industry — and the promise of careers that are not available back home.

In areas like Mukherjee Nagar, Munirka, and Humayunpur — neighbourhoods with low rents and large populations of people from the Northeast — students and young professionals often speak about living under a constant gaze.

"When I first came to Delhi for college, people would stare at me on the metro like I was a tourist," says Wein Bhir, 22, a student of sociology in Lady Sri Ram College.

Having studied in the RSS-backed Vivekananda school in Arunachal, where she learnt Sanskrit and Hindi, Bhir says that she has to prove her patriotism repeatedly.

Another problem for women is stereotyping. Maya, from Shillong, works at a beauty salon in West Delhi. "Many of us are judged for our clothing or assumed to have loose morals. We are dubbed as party people while most of my northeastern friends hardly go out to party. We don't have enough money to do that," she says.

**Food apartheid**

Sangeeta Keisan, 50, moved to Delhi from Manipur in 2005. Spokesperson for the Delhi Meitei Coordinating Committee (DMCC), a non-profit that works for the community's wellbeing, she says she studied here and even worked in a private bank for years. She says she has faced racism often.

"Now I am concerned about my teenage daughter who was born and brought up in Delhi. She complains of abuses hurled upon her on roads. Once she told me that someone called her 'momo' (a slur from dimsums, a Delhi streetfood staple). I consoled her saying that the momo is something Delhi loves." Keisan adds that Delhi is racist to anyone who does not look like north Indian.

There are other food problems. "When we go to see a room for rent, the first question is where we are from," says Neng Neiting, 30, from Manipur, who is training to be a teacher in Delhi University.

"The second question is whether we cook pork or akhuni (fermented soybean)," she says.

Lumland, a hairdresser at a multi-chain salon in Saket says that discriminations against the Northeast people is often rooted in a lack of awareness about the region.

"Despite being an integral part of the country, the Northeast remains geographically and culturally distant from the rest of India. School textbooks rarely cover our history, our heroes, languages, or traditions, which is why people in this part of the country grow up with limited knowledge of the region," he says.

**A memory and struggle**

For many Northeast residents in Delhi, the memory of Nido Taniam continues to shape their experience of the city. Taniam was 20 years old when he was mocked by a shopkeeper in Lajpat Nagar for his hairstyle and appearance, back in 2014. What began as verbal taunts quickly escalated into violence and he was assaulted to the extent that he couldn't survive the injuries.

His death sparked outrage across the Northeast. Protests erupted in cities. Parliament condemned the killing, and the government announced a series of measures aimed at addressing discrimination against people from the Northeast.

A committee headed by retired bureaucrat M.P. Bezbaruah was formed to examine the problems faced by northeastern citizens in major Indian cities. The committee later submitted recommendations that included stronger legal protections against racial discrimination and greater awareness about the Northeast in school curricula.

The Delhi Police also set up a Special Cell (Northeastern States) to handle complaints from residents of the region. Robin Hibu, who is currently serving as the Special Commissioner of Police in Delhi, had set it up. The cell aims to provide quicker response in cases involving harassment or violence and to build trust between the police and northeastern communities. A helpline (1093) was introduced and Delhi started organising Northeast festivals every year.

He explains that after the cell was established and police personnel from the Northeast were recruited into it, people from that region began to feel a greater sense of security.

"Nido's death remains a symbol of the consequences of unchecked prejudice," says Phand Len Mang, 25, from Manipur, whose family has now shifted to Meghalaya. "Creating a committee is one thing," says Mang, the son of an army man serving in Assam Rifles, but "changing attitudes on the ground is much harder." He adds that friends too will make jokes about his facial features, not realising these are racist.

Mang's message is simple: "No one in my own Capital should ask me which country I belong to."

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- Northeast helpline (1093) introduced in Delhi.
- Cultural integration efforts such as Northeast festivals.

- Legal Framework
  - Article 14 – Equality before law.
  - Article 15 – Prohibition of discrimination.
  - Article 19 – Freedom of movement and residence across India.
  - Article 51A(e) – Duty to promote harmony and common brotherhood.

# KEY HIGHLIGHTS

## Context

- A woman from Manipur was recently assaulted and racially abused in Delhi's Malviya Nagar, where teenagers used racial slurs and physically attacked her.
- The incident occurred shortly after three students from Arunachal Pradesh faced racial abuse from neighbours in Delhi.
- These cases highlight persistent racism, stereotyping, and discrimination faced by people from Northeast India in mainland cities.
- The issue recalls the 2014 death of Nido Taniam, a student from Arunachal Pradesh who died after a racist assault in Delhi, which led to nationwide protests.
- Following that incident, the Government constituted the M.P. Bezbaruah Committee to examine discrimination against people from the Northeast.

## Key Points

- Migration Trend
  - Students and professionals from the eight Northeastern states migrate to cities like Delhi for education, jobs, and healthcare.
- Common Forms of Discrimination
  - Racial slurs based on facial features and appearance.
  - Stereotyping of Northeast women regarding lifestyle and morality.
  - Housing discrimination due to food habits (e.g., pork, fermented foods).
  - Social exclusion and harassment in public spaces.
- Government Measures
  - M.P. Bezbaruah Committee (2014) to study discrimination issues.
  - Special Cell for Northeastern States established by Delhi Police.

## Static Points

- India's constitutional framework emphasizes unity in diversity.
- Fundamental rights guarantee non-discrimination and equal protection of law.
- Cultural diversity is protected through fundamental duties and minority safeguards.
- Internal migration is an important aspect of national integration and economic mobility.

## Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Racial discrimination against Northeast citizens continues despite policy measures.
- Lack of awareness about Northeast culture, history, and identity.
- Racism often appears in informal spaces such as housing, workplaces, and public transport.
- No specific anti-racism law in India.

Positive Developments

- Institutional mechanisms like special police cells and helplines.
- Government recognition of the issue through the Bezbaruah Committee.
- Growing public debate about racial equality and inclusion.

## Way Forward

- Introduce specific legal provisions against racial discrimination as recommended by the Bezbaruah Committee.
- Improve representation of Northeast history and culture in school curricula.
- Conduct sensitization programs in universities, police forces, and workplaces.
- Strengthen institutional grievance mechanisms and community support networks.
- Promote cultural exchange and awareness programmes to reduce stereotypes.

# Oil prices reflect geopolitical risks, not only supply

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In the aftermath of the war in West Asia, crude oil prices surged to as high as $118 a barrel last week. Alongside rising tensions, this situation has been building for over two months. Since mid-December 2025, when Brent crude stood at $57.56, prices have surged by more than 100%. They have, however, come down since then but remain in three digits, with no immediate sign of easing.

Historically, geopolitical shocks follow a predictable pattern. There is an immediate market overreaction that is followed by gradual stabilisation as trade routes adjust. However, the global oil market is once again operating under a profound geopolitical shadow.

**What has changed in the development now**

The developments in West Asia, intensifying strategic rivalries among major powers, and persistent conflict-driven uncertainty have brought geopolitics back to the centre of the energy discourse. Yet, the nature of this influence has shifted. Unlike previously, where regional conflicts rarely removed Gulf barrels from the global pool, the current disruptions have created tangible barriers to supply, fundamentally altering the costs, confidence, and conditions of the oil trade.

For major importing economies such as India, this shift has significant implications. Oil security is no longer just about physical access. It is also defined by exposure to the financial, logistical, and political uncertainties surrounding every shipment.

The vulnerability of global maritime arteries is stark. Around a fifth of global oil consumption is transported through the Strait of Hormuz, and roughly a tenth of seaborne crude passes through the Bab el-Mandeb and Suez corridor. The ongoing conflict involving Israel and Iran has effectively sidelined 20% of global supplies, even in the absence of planned production cuts. The market has reacted sharply to these signals. Over the past year, Brent crude has frequently fluctuated by 5%-10% within days of military or diplomatic developments, regardless of actual production volumes. Currently, however, the impact on physical supply is so drastic that prices continue to climb without a visible peak.

Tensions do more than just inflate the price of a barrel. They make maritime unsecure. Chokepoints remain vital arteries of trade, but their significance today lies in making global machinery vulnerable. Even limited disruptions or attacks on commercial shipping can alter vessel routing and raise freight costs. These drive up freight rates; the world has seen daily rates for supertankers more than double) , affect shipping insurance premiums, and tighten vessel availability. Major container carriers have implemented emergency conflict surcharges or war risk surcharges. These escalations ripple through the supply chain, directly influencing landed import prices.

**It is about politics**

Furthermore, oil has been transformed from a mere commodity into a political instrument. The redirection of Russian crude following the Ukraine conflict illustrates this dynamic. Although Russia maintained export volumes by pivoting to Asian markets, the shift introduced longer shipping routes, complex payment arrangements, and evolving compliance frameworks. What appeared stable in volume was highly volatile in operational and financial terms.

For importing countries, this creates a dual exposure. Price volatility is no longer driven solely by the supply-demand balance but by changes in geopolitical sentiment. Markets respond to diplomatic signals, military developments and regulatory announcements with a speed that often exceeds the pace of actual trade flows. This weakens the historical relationship between production levels and consumer prices.

The growing role of financial markets amplifies geopolitical sentiment, as oil is traded not only as a physical commodity but also as a financial asset through futures, options, and derivatives. During periods of stress, investors use oil as both an inflation hedge and a risk-sensitive instrument. This explains why speculative positions often expand even when physical inventories are comfortable – prices reflect expectations and portfolio behaviour rather than immediate scarcity.

Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs) have also evolved. Originally intended to address physical supply interruptions, they are now deployed to counter psychological volatility in the market. For instance, G7 leaders have announced the release of 400 million barrels of oil in response to the war in West Asia (which is said to be about 20 days of the usual oil traffic through the Strait of Hormuz). The goal is to stabilise market sentiment as much as it is to provide physical barrels. The news of these discussions recently prompted a sell-off, easing Brent and West Texas Intermediate gains to some extent.

Major powers shape this environment in different ways. The United States, now one of the world's largest producers of various petroleum products, influences markets through its strategic stock policies and diplomatic engagement with producers.

Meanwhile, Asia has become the primary centre of demand growth, accounting for the majority of incremental oil consumption over the past decade. Producer coordination through organisations such as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries continues to influence supply management, but its impact now interacts with geopolitical risk premia embedded in prices.

**The continuing relevance of oil**

The energy transition adds another layer of complexity. While renewable energy and electric mobility are expanding, oil remains central to the transport, aviation and petrochemicals sectors/industries. Global oil demand still exceeds 105 million barrels per day, and petrochemicals account for a rising share of incremental consumption. This produces a segmented market: one part linked to declining fuel use, another tied to industrial growth. Thus, geopolitics continues to exert influence over a commodity whose strategic relevance is changing but not disappearing.

For India, where oil demand is not expected to peak soon and is projected to drive much of global growth, this environment highlights the need for adaptability rather than alarm. The ability to process diverse crude grades, source from multiple geographies and maintain strategic reserves provides buffers against instability. Equally crucial is building commercial and financial expertise to navigate complex trading arrangements. Energy policy, in this sense, must integrate diplomacy, maritime awareness and market analytics.

This evolving structure complicates the notion of energy security. It now requires resilience not only against supply disruptions but also against financial and logistical shocks. Payment systems, shipping insurance, and contract enforcement have become integral to the energy security architecture.

The broader lesson is that oil has entered a phase where risk is as significant as the resource itself. Geopolitics will continue to influence oil prices by shaping perceptions of safety, reliability, and continuity, as well as affecting the physical flow of oil. Understanding this transformation is essential for managing a vulnerable world. Stability now depends on preserving predictable trade mechanisms and avoiding diplomatic ruptures that amplify uncertainty. In the years ahead, the resilience of importing nations will depend both on the origin of their crude and on how effectively they manage the political and financial currents surrounding every barrel of oil.

As tensions rise and oil volatility grows, importing nations will need adaptable energy and trade strategies

# KEY HIGHLIGHTS

## Context of the News

- The West Asia conflict involving Israel and Iran has caused a sharp surge in global oil prices.
- Brent crude increased from about $57.56 per barrel (Dec 2025) to nearly $118 per barrel, crossing the $100 mark.
- The conflict has threatened major maritime oil routes such as the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb, increasing global energy insecurity.
- Even without actual production cuts, geopolitical tensions have sidelined nearly 20% of global oil supply, leading to market volatility.

## Key Points

1. Strategic Oil Chokepoints
   - Strait of Hormuz
     - About 20% of global oil consumption passes through it.
     - Located between Iran and Oman.
   - Bab el-Mandeb Strait
     - Connects Red Sea with Gulf of Aden.
     - Nearly 10% of global seaborne crude trade passes through this route.
   - Suez Canal Corridor
     - Important route connecting Europe and Asia energy trade.
2. Geopolitical Risk Premium
   - Oil prices now include a "geopolitical risk premium" beyond supply-demand fundamentals.
   - Prices fluctuate 5–10% within days due to diplomatic or military developments.
3. Maritime and Supply Chain Impact
   - Conflict increases war-risk insurance premiums, freight costs of oil tankers, and shipping rerouting and delays.
   - Daily rates of supertankers have doubled in recent months.
4. Oil as a Political Tool
   - After the Russia–Ukraine war, Russia redirected crude exports to Asian markets.
   - Energy trade increasingly depends on sanctions, payment systems, and geopolitical alignments.
5. Financialization of Oil Markets
   - Oil is traded via futures, options, and derivatives.
   - Investors treat oil as an inflation hedge and risk asset.
   - Hence prices often respond to expectations rather than actual shortages.
6. Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR)
   - G-7 countries proposed releasing about 400 million barrels of oil to stabilize markets.
   - SPRs are used not only for supply shortage but also to stabilize market sentiment.
7. Energy Transition Context
   - Global oil demand still exceeds 105 million barrels per day.
   - Oil remains crucial for aviation, transport, and petrochemicals.
8. Implications for India
   - India imports over 85% of crude oil requirements.
   - High oil prices can widen Current Account Deficit (CAD), increase inflation, and pressure the rupee and fiscal deficit.

## Static Linkages

- India Strategic Petroleum Reserve Locations: Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, Padur; additional sites planned at Chandikhol and Padur Phase-II.
- Major Global Oil Producers: United States, Saudi Arabia, Russia.
- Key Energy Organizations: OPEC, OPEC+, International Energy Agency (IEA).
- Energy Security Dimensions: Availability, Accessibility, Affordability, Sustainability.

## Critical Analysis

Advantages / Strategic Opportunities

- Encourages energy diversification and reduced dependence on single regions.
- Promotes development of strategic petroleum reserves.
- Strengthens India's maritime security and energy diplomacy.
- Accelerates transition to renewable energy and green fuels.

Challenges

- Persistent high prices increase import bills and inflation in India.
- Shipping disruptions may create supply chain instability.
- Geopolitical tensions weaken the predictability of global energy markets.
- Oil markets increasingly influenced by financial speculation.

## Way Forward

- Diversification of Oil Imports: Increase sourcing from Africa, Latin America, and the US.
- Expansion of Strategic Petroleum Reserves: Increase storage capacity to ensure supply security.
- Energy Transition: Promote renewables, green hydrogen, biofuels, and electric mobility.
- Maritime Security: Strengthen monitoring of Indian Ocean sea lanes and chokepoints.
- Energy Diplomacy: Deepen engagement with OPEC+, Gulf countries, and emerging producers.
- Domestic Energy Efficiency: Encourage fuel efficiency and demand management policies.

# Building India's climate resilience with water at the core

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Branded the "COP of Implementation," COP 30, the 30th session of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, held in Belém, Brazil, in November 2025, marked a decisive shift in how adaptation is understood – not as an abstract promise of resilience, but as a measurable, accountable discipline grounded in systems that function under stress. At the centre of this shift is "water", moving from the margins of infrastructure planning to the core of climate survival. For the first time, global adaptation indicators integrated water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) into climate accountability, reshaping the water-food-climate nexus with implications for all countries, including India.

**Climate change felt through water**

Climate change is experienced most viscerally through water. Floods submerge cities, droughts hollow out rural economies, glacial melt destabilises Himalayan river systems, saline intrusion contaminates coastal aquifers, and erratic monsoons disrupt food security. Agriculture alone accounts for roughly 40% of anthropogenic methane emissions, with rice cultivation, livestock systems, and organic waste at the centre of the challenge. So, water use efficiency, wastewater reuse, aquifer recharge, and resilient sanitation systems are now climate strategies as much as development priorities.

The 59 Belém Adaptation Indicators, under the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience, signal a new discipline in global governance. Two clusters stand out. The first focuses on climate-resilient water and sanitation systems: reducing climate-induced water scarcity, building resilience to floods and droughts, ensuring universal access to safe drinking water, and upgrading sanitation infrastructure to withstand extreme events. The second emphasises risk governance: universal multi-hazard early warning systems by 2027, strengthened hydrometeorological services, and updated national vulnerability assessments by 2030. Water security is no longer about asset creation; it is about whether systems continue to deliver when climate stress intensifies.

**Not starting from scratch**

India is building on existing foundations. The consolidation, in 2019, of water governance under the Ministry of Jal Shakti marked a shift toward integrated stewardship, while the Water Vision 2047 aligns with Belém's adaptation framework, emphasising sustainability, equity, and resilience.

Groundwater management illustrates this transition. The evolution of the National Aquifer Mapping and Management (NAQUIM) Programme 2.0 has moved from mapping aquifers to implementing aquifer-level management plans (hydrogeological knowledge to policy action), exemplifying the systems integration that global adaptation indicators now require.

River rejuvenation tells a similar story. The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has moved beyond sewage treatment to integrate biodiversity, digital monitoring, and international collaboration, making clean rivers a buffer against climate volatility.

Despite visible progress, three systemic risks threaten to slow momentum. First, water scarcity remains acute and unevenly distributed. Most climate disasters in India are water-related, and WASH systems often serve as the first line of defence. Ensuring rural and urban water supply during floods or prolonged droughts would require climate stress testing of infrastructure, diversification of sources, and redundancy in service delivery – not simply expanding coverage figures.

Second, adaptation finance remains fragile. While global rhetoric speaks of mobilising $1.3 trillion annually by 2035, operational pathways remain uncertain. Without predictable and accessible flows of adaptation finance, post-disaster recovery will crowd out long-term resilience planning. Water projects need explicit classification and funding as climate investments, not mere sectoral costs.

Third, digital fragmentation persists. Despite India's vast hydrological and meteorological data, an Artificial Intelligence-driven real-time integration into planning, budgeting, and local governance systems remains limited.

A closer look at India's institutional landscape reveals that most global adaptation targets already have corresponding domestic missions. Drinking water coverage, sanitation expansion, irrigation efficiency, urban water reforms, and climate action plans exist across Ministries and States. Climate stress indicators must be embedded into mission dashboards.

Belém calls for convergence, not reinvention. India's strength in digital public infrastructure offers an opportunity to integrate hydrological data, crop advisories, insurance and financial flows into interoperable platforms for real-time decision-making.

**Belém indicators guide climate survival**

The Belém indicators are not a bureaucratic checklist; they are a dashboard for survival. If implemented with seriousness, they can transform adaptation from a peripheral conversation into the organising principle of development strategy. India stands at a pivotal moment. Its domestic water reforms, technological capabilities, and community-led initiatives position it not just as a participant in global climate negotiations but also as a potential leader in operationalising adaptation at scale.

Water must anchor climate action. Implementation must be swift, equitable, and technologically robust. Resilience should be measured not by infrastructure built, but by systems that continue to serve people when the next flood arrives, when the next drought lingers, and when the next climate shock tests the nation's preparedness. India has much of the blueprint in place. India should align its missions, metrics and money quickly enough to convert ambition into measurable resilience – and in doing so, lead the Global South by its exemplary performance.

Guided by the Belém Indicators, India can set an example for the Global South by making water systems resilient

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- COP-30 (30th United Nations Climate Change Conference) was held in Belém, Brazil (November 2025) and was termed the "COP of Implementation."
- It focused on operationalising climate adaptation commitments, especially those under the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience (UAE-FGCR) adopted at COP-28 (Dubai).
- The conference introduced Belém Adaptation Indicators (59 indicators) to measure global progress on climate adaptation.
- For the first time, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) systems were integrated into global climate adaptation accountability frameworks.
- The development highlights the central role of water systems in climate resilience, particularly for developing countries like India.

### Key Points

- 59 Belém Adaptation Indicators aim to measure adaptation progress globally.
- Two major thematic clusters:

1. Climate-Resilient Water and Sanitation Systems
   - Reducing climate-induced water scarcity.
   - Building resilience to floods and droughts.
   - Ensuring universal access to safe drinking water.
   - Upgrading sanitation systems to withstand climate shocks.
2. Risk Governance and Early Warning Systems
   - Universal Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems by 2027.
   - Strengthening hydrometeorological services.
   - Updating national vulnerability and risk assessments by 2030.

Climate Change Impacts Through Water

- Floods and droughts intensifying due to climate change.
- Glacial melt threatening Himalayan river systems.
- Saltwater intrusion affecting coastal groundwater.
- Erratic monsoon patterns impacting food security.

Emissions and Agriculture

- Agriculture contributes ~40% of anthropogenic methane emissions (IPCC).
- Major sources:
  - Rice cultivation
  - Livestock systems
  - Organic waste

Key Climate Adaptation Strategies

- Water-use efficiency in agriculture.
- Wastewater treatment and reuse.
- Groundwater recharge.
- Climate-resilient sanitation infrastructure.

### Static Linkages

- India receives ~75–80% of annual rainfall from the southwest monsoon.
- Groundwater accounts for ~85% of rural drinking water supply and ~50–60% of irrigation (CGWB).
- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) emphasises early warning systems.
- Paris Agreement (2015) emphasises both mitigation and adaptation.
- Disaster Management Act, 2005 created the NDMA-led disaster governance framework.

### Critical Analysis

Significance

- Moves climate governance from commitments to measurable implementation.
- Recognises water as the primary medium through which climate change impacts societies.
- Promotes integrated water-food-climate nexus policy frameworks.
- Supports developing countries by highlighting adaptation needs rather than only mitigation targets.

Challenges

- Adaptation finance gap: Global requirement estimated around $1.3 trillion annually by 2035.
- Water scarcity and uneven distribution in India.
- Fragmented hydrological data systems affecting climate planning.

- Institutional coordination issues across central, state and local governments.

India's Preparedness

- Ministry of Jal Shakti (2019) integrated water governance.
- National Aquifer Mapping and Management Programme (NAQUIM) for groundwater management.
- National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) integrating river rejuvenation with ecological restoration.
- Water Vision 2047 emphasises sustainable and climate-resilient water systems.

**Way Forward**

- Integrate climate adaptation indicators into national water missions such as Jal Jeevan Mission and Atal Bhujal Yojana.
- Increase adaptation finance through global climate funds and domestic climate budgeting.
- Develop AI-driven integrated hydrological data platforms for real-time planning.
- Promote nature-based solutions such as watershed management, wetland conservation and river rejuvenation.
- Strengthen community participation in water governance through local institutions.
- Expand early warning systems and hydrometeorological networks in climate-vulnerable regions.

# House decorum

## The ruling party and the Opposition must rise above partisanship

The Lok Sabha rejected by voice vote, on March 11, a resolution under Article 94(C) of the Constitution for the removal of Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla from office, but only after a hostile debate on the functioning of the House deepened the wedge between the government and the Opposition. In principle, Parliament is the foundation of representative democracy, and its routine functions act as an instrument that holds the cabinet accountable. As a forum for government-Opposition interaction, it is meant to operate in a structured, methodical way. Single-party dominance has eroded all these formal and informal functions of legislatures at all levels, and the Lok Sabha, sadly, has become a platform for political partisanship. In recent years, the chairs of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha have been dragged into political conflict. In 2024, there was an Opposition resolution to remove Jagdeep Dhankhar as Rajya Sabha Chairman. Though the resolution did not pass, he resigned as Vice-President for unexplained reasons. The Opposition has raised concerns over the Lok Sabha's functioning, but what precipitated their protest into a formal resolution for Mr. Birla's removal was, possibly, his statement that he had confidential knowledge that Congress women MPs might act against Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the House floor.

Opposition MPs are routinely denied the opportunity to raise substantive issues, though the government cites statistics in its rebuttal. The Speaker had disallowed Leader of the Opposition (Lok Sabha) Rahul Gandhi from quoting former Army Chief M.M. Naravane's unpublished memoir, which discusses Prime Minister Narendra Modi's role in the 2020 military standoff with China. The microphones of Opposition MPs are frequently switched off during debates. The Opposition has pointed out that in February, Mr. Gandhi was interrupted 20 times while speaking during the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address and also blocked from raising the Gautam Adani investigation issue in the U.S. and the EU-U.S. trade deal. The government argued that the Opposition was given 56% of Zero Hour time, and that NDA MPs, despite their majority, received 321 supplementary questions against the Opposition's 364 during his tenure. Home Minister Amit Shah said that the House's productivity during Mr. Birla's tenure had been high and that it had debated in 14 regional languages. Mr. Shah also cornered Mr. Gandhi for being frequently absent from the House. The resolution and the debate manifested a deeply fractured polity in need of urgent corrective measures. The ruling majority and the Opposition must rise above partisanship and restore the majesty of Parliament.

# KEY HIGHLIGHTS

## Context

- On 11 March 2026, the Lok Sabha rejected by voice vote a resolution seeking the removal of Speaker Om Birla.
- The motion was moved by the Opposition under Article 94(c) of the Constitution.
- The debate highlighted growing tensions between the government and Opposition regarding the functioning of Parliament.
- The government defended the Speaker citing high productivity of the House, while the Opposition alleged restrictions on raising important issues.

## Key Points

- Removal Motion
  - Moved under Article 94(c) of the Constitution.
  - Requires a resolution passed by a majority of all the then members of the Lok Sabha.
  - The resolution against the Speaker was rejected by voice vote.
- Opposition's Concerns
  - Alleged frequent interruptions during speeches.
  - Claims that microphones of Opposition MPs were switched off during debates.
  - Alleged restrictions on raising issues such as:
    - Quoting former Army Chief M.M. Naravane's unpublished memoir.
    - Raising international investigations involving Indian corporate groups.
- Government's Response
  - Opposition was allotted 56% of Zero Hour time.
  - Opposition MPs asked 364 supplementary questions, while NDA MPs asked 321.
  - Parliamentary debates were conducted in 14 regional languages.
  - Government highlighted high productivity of the Lok Sabha during the Speaker's tenure.
- Political Context
  - Increasing politicisation of presiding officers in Parliament.
  - In 2024, a resolution was moved to remove the Rajya Sabha Chairman (Vice-President) though it did not succeed.

## Static Linkages

- Article 93 – Lok Sabha shall choose Speaker and Deputy Speaker.
- Article 94 – Speaker may vacate office by:
  - Resignation to the Deputy Speaker.
  - Removal by resolution passed by majority of all the then members of the House.
- Speaker continues in office even after dissolution of Lok Sabha until the new House elects a Speaker.
- The Speaker:
  - Presides over Lok Sabha proceedings.
  - Decides admissibility of motions and questions.
  - Certifies Money Bills (Article 110).
  - Decides disqualification under the Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law).

## Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Perceived decline in neutrality of presiding officers.
- Majoritarian dominance affecting deliberative democracy.
- Reduced space for Opposition scrutiny of the executive.
- Frequent disruptions weakening legislative debate.

Government View

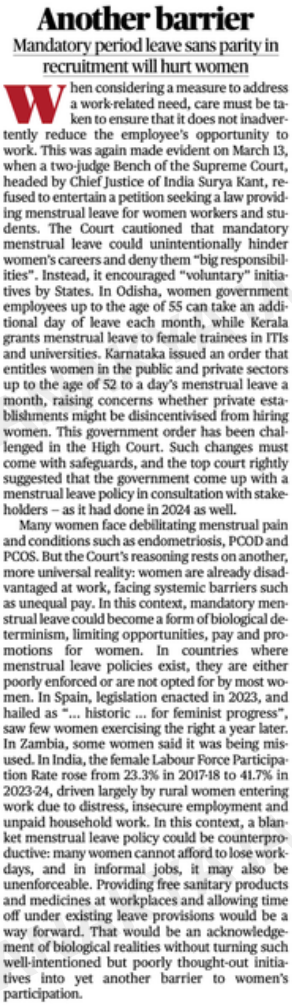
- High legislative productivity.
- Statistical evidence of Opposition participation.
- Disruptions often caused by Opposition protests.

Implication

- Growing polarisation in Parliament.
- Potential weakening of institutional credibility of legislatures.

## Way Forward

- Strengthen neutrality and independence of the Speaker's office.
- Ensure equal speaking opportunities for government and Opposition.
- Improve parliamentary discipline and attendance of MPs.
- Increase reliance on department-related parliamentary committees for detailed scrutiny.
- Encourage consensus-based parliamentary functioning.



**Another barrier**

Mandatory period leave sans parity in recruitment will hurt women

When considering a measure to address a work-related need, care must be taken to ensure that it does not inadvertently reduce the employee's opportunity to work. This was again made evident on March 13, when a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court, headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, refused to entertain a petition seeking a law providing menstrual leave for women workers and students. The Court cautioned that mandatory menstrual leave could unintentionally hinder women's careers and deny them "big responsibilities". Instead, it encouraged "voluntary" initiatives by States. In Odisha, women government employees up to the age of 55 can take an additional day of leave each month, while Kerala grants menstrual leave to female trainees in ITIs and universities. Karnataka issued an order that entitles women in the public and private sectors up to the age of 52 to a day's menstrual leave a month, raising concerns whether private establishments might be disincentivised from hiring women. This government order has been challenged in the High Court. Such changes must come with safeguards, and the top court rightly suggested that the government come up with a menstrual leave policy in consultation with stakeholders – as it had done in 2024 as well.

Many women face debilitating menstrual pain and conditions such as endometriosis, PCOD and PCOS. But the Court's reasoning rests on another, more universal reality: women are already disadvantaged at work, facing systemic barriers such as unequal pay. In this context, mandatory menstrual leave could become a form of biological determinism, limiting opportunities, pay and promotions for women. In countries where menstrual leave policies exist, they are either poorly enforced or are not opted for by most women. In Spain, legislation enacted in 2023, and hailed as "... historic ... for feminist progress", saw few women exercising the right a year later. In Zambia, some women said it was being misused. In India, the female Labour Force Participation Rate rose from 23.3% in 2017-18 to 41.7% in 2023-24, driven largely by rural women entering work due to distress, insecure employment and unpaid household work. In this context, a blanket menstrual leave policy could be counterproductive: many women cannot afford to lose workdays, and in informal jobs, it may also be unenforceable. Providing free sanitary products and medicines at workplaces and allowing time off under existing leave provisions would be a way forward. That would be an acknowledgement of biological realities without turning such well-intentioned but poorly thought-out initiatives into yet another barrier to women's participation.

# KEY HIGHLIGHTS

## Context

- On 13 March 2026, the Supreme Court (two-judge bench headed by CJI Surya Kant) refused to entertain a petition seeking a mandatory law for menstrual leave for women workers and students.
- The Court observed that compulsory menstrual leave may unintentionally reduce employment opportunities for women and could lead to discrimination in hiring and promotions.
- The Court suggested that States may adopt voluntary policies after consultation with stakeholders.

## Key Points

- Existing State Initiatives
  - Odisha: One additional menstrual leave per month for women government employees up to 55 years.
  - Kerala: Menstrual leave allowed for female trainees in ITIs and universities.
  - Karnataka: One day menstrual leave per month for women employees (up to 52 years) in public and private sectors; order challenged in High Court.
- Health Concerns
  - Many women experience severe menstrual pain and disorders such as:
    - Endometriosis
    - Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)
    - Polycystic Ovarian Disorder (PCOD)
- Women in Workforce
  - Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) increased from 23.3% (2017-18) to 41.7% (2023-24) (Periodic Labour Force Survey – MoSPI).
  - Large proportion of women workers are in the informal sector, where enforcement of such leave policies is difficult.
- Global Examples
  - Spain (2023): Introduced menstrual leave but low uptake reported.
  - Zambia: Menstrual leave policy exists but concerns about misuse.

## Static Linkages

- Equality before law and prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex.
- Directive Principle requiring the State to ensure humane conditions of work and maternity relief.
- Labour welfare and working conditions fall under the Concurrent List.
- Protection of dignity and health of workers as part of the right to life.

## Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Recognises women's biological and health needs.
- May improve workplace inclusivity and well-being.
- Helps women suffering from severe menstrual disorders.

Concerns

- Hiring discrimination against women employees.
- May reinforce biological determinism in workplaces.
- Difficult to implement in the informal sector.
- Women may avoid using leave due to stigma.

## Way Forward

- Adopt flexible menstrual leave or wellness leave policies rather than mandatory provisions.
- Provide sanitary products and health facilities at workplaces.
- Strengthen gender-sensitive workplace policies.
- Ensure legal safeguards against discrimination in hiring and promotions.
- Improve formalisation of employment to extend labour protections to women workers.

# What could have been done to avert a cooking gas crisis — and wasn't

MANI SHANKAR AIYAR

INITIALLY resisted the offer of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas when the UPA government was formed in May 2004 because I considered MoPNG a notorious den of bribery against patronage to undeserving second-rate politicians and their clients. But, when I was overruled and given "temporary" charge of the ministry, I was pleasantly surprised to discover through briefings by senior officers and public-sector oil honchos that the ministry had, in fact, a key role to play in "energy security" to complement, on an equal footing, the external affairs ministry's responsibility for "geopolitical security" and the finance/commerce ministries' responsibility for "economic security", which together with MoPNG, add up to "national security".

At that time, two decades ago, our dependency on oil and gas imports was about 70 per cent of our requirements. It is now nearer 90 per cent. Deeply impressed by economist Vijay Kelkar's comment that natural gas would be to the 21st century what petroleum had been in the 20th and coal in the 19th and wood till the 18th, I focused my energies, and those of the ministry and its subordinate bodies, in particular the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH), as well as the public-sector oil companies, on the critical issue of "energy security".

This required a two-track approach: Domestic and external. On the domestic track, we had to build a global network of research institutions that would provide the technology to drill through the lava and volcanic rock-laden "Deccan trap" to get to our own domestic on-shore reserves, which were at a depth hundreds of metres below the surface and had only been tapped in similar circumstances, but on a much smaller scale, in Colorado. Off-shore, we had to penetrate some 10,000 metres in the Arabian Sea (against the North Sea's 150 metres) to replicate our principal source of offshore energy, Bombay High, discovered in 1973. This, too, required a global science and technology network but held greater promise because Exxon was drilling at deep depths in the Gulf of Mexico. Wherever I travelled, I sought to bring into our ken the networking of technological institutions as the key to energy security through technology that held the potential to yield abundant domestic Indian supplies of oil and gas.

I also prioritised, against some objection from both the finance and external affairs ministries, securing against fierce Chinese competition our own foreign exploratory fields, especially in our abundantly petroleum-endowed proximate neighbourhood, ranging from Iran and the Gulf to Central Asia, especially around the Caspian Sea: Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan, even landlocked Uzbekistan, visiting exploration sites and pipelines from Baku on the Caspian to the terminal at Ceyhan on the eastern Mediterranean in Turkey. I even overcame my instinctive dislike of Israel to examine whether we could avoid the choke point of the Strait of Hormuz (whose closing is now causing severe cooking-gas shortage in India) by extending the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline through Ashkelon and Eilat at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba to bring Central Asian oil and gas direct to the Indian Ocean and parallel pipelines from North Africa to the Indian Ocean, escaping the choke points of the Bab al-Mandab on the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz.

Above all, I pitched for piping natural gas from Iran through Pakistan to energy-and-coal deficient Rajasthan, as well as from Sittwe (Akyab) off the Myanmar coast (where GAIL had discovered natural gas) through Cox's Bazar and Jessore in Bangladesh to supply vast quantities of piped natural gas to the upcoming giant petrochemical complex in Haldia, West Bengal.

Little of this fructified because I was relieved of my "temporary" charge of MoPNG within 20 months. My successors did not prioritise "energy security", through the domestic or external routes, concentrating instead on procuring as much petroleum and gas as could be procured from foreign markets, thus raising our external dependence to 90 per cent and leaving us even more dependent on outside sources instead of focusing on our own domestic and external sources of supply.

It is this lack of attention to "energy security" in the pursuit of purchasing external supplies that has brought us to the present cooking-gas crisis. Instead of treating MoPNG as the handmaiden of S Jaishankar's external affairs ministry, the Hamas attack on Israel in 2023 — three years ago — and the sharp Israeli response of undertaking genocide in Gaza should have alerted MoPNG to the imperative need to stock up on cooking gas, especially as our overall petroleum policies had resulted in our becoming the world's second largest consumer of LPG cooking gas at 3 million tonnes a month, 60 per cent of which is imported.

Far too late, the Essential Commodities Act has been invoked, oil refineries have been ordered to ramp up LPG output and the minister says he is in touch with "over 40 countries" to secure LPG. But why was all this not done a year ago when it became clear, especially after the vicious 12-day war of June 2025, that when all-out war happened, as it obviously would, the obvious Iranian retaliation would be to close the choke point of the Strait of Hormuz?

We have strategic reserves of crude oil. We even have two strategic caverns of LPG at Visakhapatnam and Mangaluru, but the total "strategic" stock of LPG, we now discover, is no more than a day's consumption or perhaps a couple of days more. Is this not gross irresponsibility? Why did we not order LPG purchases on the high seas to stock up — albeit at higher prices but not so high as now? Why did we not pursue domestic and external energy security as the principal goal of the ministry over the last two decades, but especially after West Asia started tottering on the brink of war? Hardeep Puri is now closing the stable door — but long after the horse has fled.

**Far too late, the Essential Commodities Act has been invoked, oil refineries ordered to ramp up LPG output and the minister says he is in touch with 'over 40 countries' to secure LPG. But why was all this not done a year ago?**

*The writer is former Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, 2004-06*

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- India's heavy dependence on imported oil and LPG has raised concerns after escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia and risks of disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, a key global oil transit chokepoint.
- India imports about 85–90% of crude oil and nearly 60% of its LPG demand, making the country vulnerable to global conflicts and supply shocks.
- The Israel–Hamas conflict (2023) and subsequent regional tensions highlighted the possibility of closure of critical maritime chokepoints affecting energy supplies.
- Concerns emerged over India's limited strategic reserves of LPG, despite having strategic crude oil reserves.
- The government has invoked the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 and intensified LPG procurement efforts from multiple countries to stabilise domestic supply.

### Key Points

- High Import Dependence
  - Crude oil import dependence: ~85–90%.
  - LPG import dependence: ~60%.
  - India is the second-largest LPG consumer in the world.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR)
  - Underground storage facilities at:
    - Visakhapatnam
    - Mangaluru
    - Padur
  - Additional reserves planned under Phase-II (Chandikhol and Padur expansion).
- Major Global Energy Chokepoints
  - Strait of Hormuz
  - Bab-el-Mandeb Strait
  - Suez Canal
- Energy Security Strategies
  - Domestic exploration through Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) and Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP).
  - Overseas investments in oil fields by ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL).
  - Energy diplomacy with Middle East, Russia, Central Asia and Africa.
- Government Initiatives
  - Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) for LPG access to poor households.
  - Expansion of natural gas infrastructure and city gas distribution networks.
  - Target to increase natural gas share in India's energy mix to 15% by 2030.

### Static Linkages

- Energy resources are fundamental for industrial growth and economic development.
- Strategic reserves are maintained to ensure supply during wars, disasters, or global disruptions.
- Maritime chokepoints influence global trade and energy transportation routes.
- Natural gas is considered a relatively cleaner transition fuel compared to coal and oil.
- Geopolitical stability of resource-rich regions significantly affects energy-importing countries.

### Critical Analysis

Strengths

- Diversification of import sources reduces reliance on a single region.
- Strategic petroleum reserves help buffer short-term supply disruptions.
- Expansion of LPG access improves energy access and public health.
- International energy diplomacy strengthens India's geopolitical influence.

Challenges

- Excessive dependence on West Asian energy supplies.
- Limited strategic LPG storage capacity compared to crude reserves.
- Domestic hydrocarbon exploration remains limited due to geological constraints.
- Vulnerability to global price volatility and maritime chokepoint disruptions.

Stakeholder Concerns

- Consumers affected by LPG price volatility.
- Government balancing energy affordability and fiscal burden of subsidies.
- Oil PSUs responsible for ensuring stable supply and infrastructure expansion.

### Way Forward

- Expand strategic reserves for LPG and natural gas, not only crude oil.
- Accelerate domestic hydrocarbon exploration using advanced technology.
- Diversify import sources across Africa, Americas and Central Asia.
- Strengthen renewable energy transition to reduce fossil fuel dependence.

# NCERT must heed the lesson in the Court's rebuke

J S RAJPUT

THE NCERT has disturbed the highest court of India, and its credibility stands bruised. Anger and anguish have been expressed in no uncertain terms by the Supreme Court of India over a section on corruption in the judiciary. One is shocked and disturbed by all that has followed media reports on a certain chapter in a Class VIII Social Science textbook.

On a broader canvas, the institutional relationship between these bodies deserves to be examined to ensure higher levels of professional competence and the delivery of justice to all — whether an individual, an institution, or an organisation. Public institutions are expected to be mutually supportive in their pursuit of excellence. Institutional credibility is a consequence of the competence, commitment, and contributions of its internal professionals.

The SC enjoys the trust and confidence of every Indian. There are other institutions that also make Indians proud. The NCERT is one of them, an institution that I served for three decades as a professor, including five years as its director. The NCERT is an autonomous body created and funded by the Government of India. It nurtures the future of India and attempts to transform innocent persons into responsible personalities. It sustains dynamism in education and prepares the young in their pursuit of knowledge. The judiciary at every level consists of judges and lawyers who hold the NCERT in great respect. From extensive personal experience, one can say that they have never hesitated to express their gratitude to the organisation.

However, the section on corruption in the judiciary has exposed vulnerabilities in the preparation of textbooks and, it must be stated unhesitatingly, dented the credibility of the NCERT, credibility that has been built over six decades by its academics, many of whom have enjoyed great reputations for their illustrious contributions.

The SC passed a judgment on March 11, imposing a ban on three senior professionals in connection with the chapter on corruption. Their names were included in the submission made by the NCERT to the Court. Presumably, they never got an opportunity to present their case. None of them is an NCERT academic, yet their reputations stand tarnished. As a lay person, fully conscious of one's own inadequacies, one wonders whether such a situation should be inflicted upon any citizen without being given an opportunity to present his or her version.

One also wonders how the NCERT could publish books without ensuring that someone is fully responsible for suitability of the content. The NCERT has around 500 academics, including teachers. The practice followed in the preparation of textbooks up to 2004 was to solicit expert advice from across the country to ensure the national character of the output, but the final responsibility rested with the regular academic experts of the NCERT. Morally and ethically, every word published by the NCERT is the responsibility of the director. It may appear harsh on my part, but an organisation entrusted with educating the young in human values must also practise those values. Autonomy necessarily brings accountability. The ministry cannot be faulted for what is fully and completely the responsibility of the NCERT.

I was privileged to be a member of the committee set up by the Government of India under the chairmanship of Chief Justice J S Verma to conceptualise ways to teach Fundamental Duties to citizens. Though the focus was on duties, it was not possible to do justice to the assigned task without bringing in the mutuality of rights and duties, fundamental rights included. The report quoted Mahatma Gandhi: "I learned from my illiterate but wise mother that all rights to be deserved and preserved come from duties well done." It deserves to be recalled and analysed in the present context.

The NCERT must play its role with reassured professional competence and confidence. Let it help prepare the best minds, including those who may serve at every level of the judiciary. Let the NCERT receive the reverence of a national guru from everyone, including the Supreme Court of India.

*The writer, former director of NCERT, works in education, social cohesion and religious amity*

The section on corruption in the judiciary has exposed vulnerabilities in the preparation of textbooks and dented the credibility of the NCERT, built over six decades

# KEY HIGHLIGHTS

## Context of the News

- The **Supreme Court of India expressed concern over a Class VIII Social Science textbook prepared by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) that contained a section discussing corruption in the judiciary.
- On 11 March, the Supreme Court took note of the issue and barred three professionals associated with the chapter from participating in further textbook-related work.
- The issue triggered debate on academic autonomy, institutional accountability, and credibility of public institutions.
- The controversy also exposed procedural lapses in textbook preparation and content review mechanisms.

## Key Points

- NCERT is an autonomous institution under the Ministry of Education, responsible for curriculum design, textbook preparation, and educational research.
- The Supreme Court raised concerns about content affecting the credibility of the judiciary.
- The case highlighted lack of clear accountability in textbook authorship and review.
- Traditionally, NCERT textbooks are prepared through:
  - Expert committees and academic consultations
  - Peer review by subject specialists
  - Final approval by NCERT authorities
- The controversy reflects tension between institutional respect and academic discussion of governance issues.

## Static Linkages

- NCERT established in 1961 to assist and advise governments on school education.
- Article 19(1)(a) guarantees freedom of speech and expression, including academic expression.
- Article 51A (Fundamental Duties) emphasises promotion of harmony, scientific temper, and responsible citizenship.
- Separation of powers ensures institutional balance among legislature, executive, and judiciary.
- Judicial accountability mechanisms include in-house procedures and removal of judges under Article 124(4).

## Critical Analysis

Issues Highlighted

- Weak textbook review and content validation system in NCERT.
- Potential conflict between academic freedom and institutional respect.
- Questions regarding due process for experts whose names were submitted to the court.

Institutional Concerns

- Risk of erosion of credibility of national institutions.
- Possibility of self-censorship in educational discourse.
- Need for clear responsibility within autonomous bodies.

## Way Forward

- Strengthen multi-layer peer review mechanisms in textbook preparation.
- Ensure clear accountability of editorial boards and institutional leadership.
- Maintain balance between critical education and respect for constitutional institutions.
- Promote value-based civic education emphasising rights and duties.
- Develop standard guidelines for discussing governance and constitutional institutions in school curricula.

# Air power deters, but enduring outcomes need more

G S Bedi

THE US-Israel air campaign against Iran highlights both the power and the limits of air-delivered retribution. Air strikes can penetrate deep, hit critical nodes with precision, and signal resolve within hours — yet even with this intense barrage, few serious observers believe Tehran's regime will fall to just bombs and missiles. While acknowledging the prowess of air power, military historian T R Fehrenbach articulated the importance of boots on the ground over bombs in the sky. That logic frames the central question for India: Air power can punish and deter, but who will convert those fleeting effects into enduring political outcomes?

Air power has become critical to contemporary statecraft. It satisfies domestic expectations for visible retribution and sends deterrent signals to foes, while avoiding full-scale conflict. In May 2025, the IAF conducted long-range strikes at will, forcing Pakistan to seek a ceasefire. However, the outcomes of air power are also easier to question. As arguments following Balakot demonstrated, observers can doubt the degree of the damage inflicted, despite the value of the strike's political signal. The adversary, then, has significant incentives to downplay losses. Air campaigns can be operationally successful and tactically beneficial, but claims of "victory" remain vulnerable to narrative warfare. For India, this means swift air retribution cannot be the single foundation upon which military victory is built.

In the Russia-Ukraine conflict, every movement in the frontline is regarded as a strategic milestone. Similarly, the purpose in Kargil was to remove Pakistani intruders and restore the LoC's integrity. Gaining territory requires superiority in contact warfare. The Army's primary objective is to win contact battles, then occupy and protect captured territory. Land forces worldwide often prioritise "strategic" capabilities, like long-range missiles and advanced stand-off systems. When an army acts like a second air force, it risks under-equipping the infantry and artillery.

Clear roles are the solution. The Air Force and authorised tri-service strategic forces should be responsible for long-range deep strike operations. The Army should prioritise suppressing enemy artillery, neutralising local reserves, and enabling manoeuvre over pursuing independent strategic strikes. The Navy must avoid becoming a small "air force at sea" at the cost of underinvesting in submarines, anti-submarine warfare, logistics and upkeep.

Air campaigns can be operationally successful and tactically beneficial, but claims of 'victory' remain vulnerable to narrative warfare

India's indigenisation effort offers an opportunity to align technology, doctrine, and budgets. The Army can create a soldier-centric ecosystem by incorporating reliable indigenous small arms, night sights, integrated infantry radios, armoured and mine-protected vehicles, artillery, loitering munitions, counter-drone systems, and field-ready software tools. These will be more important in the next crisis than any long-range platform.

The Army's ability to march into hostile territory when directed is important. To get there, the services must embrace technology while remaining true to their basic missions, and the Army, above all, must invest in the hard, vital qualities of close combat that have always determined victories in wars.

*The writer is a former DG (I&S), fighter pilot and air advisor at the High Commission of India, London*

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context

- The U.S.–Israel air campaign against Iran highlighted the increasing reliance on precision air strikes for deterrence and rapid retaliation.
- However, analysts note that air power alone rarely produces decisive political outcomes without ground forces.
- The debate is relevant for India after IAF long-range strikes against Pakistan (2025) and earlier Balakot air strikes (2019).
- It raises questions on force structure, jointness among services, and defence indigenisation.

### Key Points

- Air power advantages
  - Rapid retaliation and strategic signalling.
  - Precision strikes on critical infrastructure and military targets.
  - Lower troop casualties and escalation control.
- Limitations
  - Cannot capture or hold territory.
  - Impact often disputed due to information warfare.
  - Tactical success may not translate into strategic victory.
- Role of Land Forces
  - Ground forces determine outcomes by winning contact battles and holding territory.
  - Example: Kargil War (1999) where Indian Army restored the Line of Control.
- Need for Role Clarity
  - Air Force: deep strategic strikes and air superiority.
  - Army: territorial control and close combat.
  - Navy: maritime security, submarines, sea-lane protection.
- Indigenisation priorities
  - Small arms, night-vision systems, infantry radios.
  - Artillery, armoured vehicles, loitering munitions.
  - Counter-drone and battlefield communication systems.

### Static Linkages

- Wars are decided by control of territory and population.
- Combined arms doctrine integrates infantry, artillery, armour and air support.
- Deterrence theory emphasises credible retaliatory capability.
- Kargil conflict illustrates the importance of ground dominance.

### Critical Analysis

Pros

- Quick and precise military response.
- Strong deterrence signalling.

Concerns

- Air strikes alone cannot achieve lasting strategic outcomes.
- Overinvestment in high-tech platforms may weaken infantry and artillery capability.
- Need stronger tri-service coordination.

### Way Forward

- Develop joint theatre commands for integrated operations.
- Maintain balanced investment between technology and ground forces.
- Accelerate indigenous defence manufacturing.
- Strengthen multi-domain warfare capabilities (drones, cyber, electronic warfare).

# Return of Russian oil signals US pragmatism

THE DONALD Trump administration's decision to suspend certain sanctions on Russian oil for 30 days marks an important moment in the geopolitics of energy, war and diplomacy in the Gulf region. The implications stretch beyond the urgent need to stabilise the energy markets. It points to the prospects for a long-overdue political understanding between Washington and Moscow. After the US and Israel launched a military campaign against Iran two weeks ago, Tehran effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz — the chokepoint through which roughly 20 per cent of the world's oil transits — sending crude prices from around $70 to above $110 per barrel. Facing the prospect of an energy shock capable of destabilising major economies, Washington concluded that extraordinary measures were necessary.

Trump's move reflects Washington's appreciation of oil-rich Russia's weight in shaping the global energy market. By letting Russian oil flow into the markets, Washington hopes to ease prices without formally dismantling the broader sanctions regime built since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The International Energy Agency simultaneously announced its largest-ever emergency stockpile drawdown, though neither measure has so far succeeded in fully calming markets. The Russian oil waiver initially applied to India alone before being extended to all buyers. The India-specific origins acknowledged New Delhi's deep energy dependence and its role as a major global buyer. The broader expansion to all buyers signalled that under acute supply pressure, Washington is willing to accept flexibility in the sanctions framework.

While India welcomes this pragmatism, Europe has reacted with alarm, warning that eased sanctions replenish the Kremlin's war chest and release the political pressure on Moscow to end the war in Ukraine. Clearly, there is no escaping the tension, if sanctions are the primary lever of Western pressure on Russia. Beyond the immediate needs of reducing the pressure on energy markets, the easing of Russian sanctions raises the broader question of a breakthrough in US-Russian political engagement. The sanctions architecture is embedded in US domestic legislation, alliance politics, and the challenge of constructing a peace in Ukraine that is acceptable to Europe. Trump's 30-day waiver could be seen as a tactical adjustment under pressure, not a strategic reorientation. It reveals, however, a structural reality that Western policymakers have long sought to obscure: The global energy system remains dependent on Russian hydrocarbons. Russia could also play a significant role in facilitating stability in the Middle East. Building on US convergences with Russia while finding a reasonable agreement on Ukraine is one of the most consequential diplomatic challenges today. It is also a strategic opportunity that Delhi must press Washington and Moscow to seize.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- The US administration under Donald Trump granted a 30-day waiver allowing the purchase of Russian oil despite sanctions imposed after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- The decision came after tensions with Iran escalated following military action by the US and Israel.
- Iran reportedly restricted passage through the Strait of Hormuz, through which ~20% of global oil trade passes.
- Crude oil prices rose sharply from ~$70 to over $110 per barrel, raising fears of a global energy shock.
- The waiver initially applied to India due to its dependence on imported crude, and was later extended to all buyers.
- The International Energy Agency simultaneously announced a large emergency release of oil from strategic reserves to stabilise markets.

### Key Points

- Russia is among the top global oil producers and a key supplier to Asia.
- Sanctions on Russian oil were imposed by Western countries to reduce Moscow's revenue for the Ukraine war.
- India has increased Russian crude imports due to discounted prices since 2022.
- The Strait of Hormuz is one of the most critical global oil chokepoints.
- Strategic petroleum reserves and emergency stockpile releases are tools to manage global supply disruptions.
- The waiver indicates pragmatic flexibility in sanctions policy during global energy crises.

### Static Linkages

- Energy security refers to uninterrupted availability of energy sources at affordable prices.
- Major oil chokepoints influencing global trade include Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, and Bab-el-Mandeb.
- India imports over 85% of its crude oil requirement.
- India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) facilities are located at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur.

### Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Helps stabilise global oil prices and prevent economic shocks.
- Ensures energy supply security for import-dependent countries like India.
- Opens space for potential US–Russia diplomatic engagement.

Concerns

- Weakens the sanctions regime against Russia.
- May increase geopolitical divisions within the Western alliance, especially with Europe.
- Reinforces the structural dependence of global energy markets on fossil fuels.

### Way Forward

- Diversify energy supply sources and reduce overdependence on specific regions.
- Strengthen strategic petroleum reserves and energy diplomacy.
- Accelerate transition to renewable energy and alternative fuels.
- Promote multilateral coordination for energy market stability.

# Delhi's new Water Plan confronts old failures

LAST WEEK, the Delhi government announced that it will frame a Water Master Plan for the city. Though belated, the decision is a step in the right direction. Improving water quality — especially cleaning the Yamuna along its 22-km stretch in the capital — was a major campaign plank for the BJP in the run-up to the 2025 Delhi assembly election. Yet, after a year in office, the BJP government's record remains underwhelming. It has claimed progress in cleaning the river. The latest report of the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) suggests that water quality has improved compared to last year. However, the same data indicate that contaminant levels remain significantly above permissible limits. Particularly worrying is the fact that the city's sewer system carried far more pollutants into the river in January than it did in October. Although the pollution load eased somewhat in February, the volume of untreated sewage entering the Yamuna remained worryingly high. The pattern suggests that after the abundant monsoon rains, a dry winter has left the river without the flows necessary to cleanse itself. The data should prompt a serious conversation on how pollutants can be reduced during the lean season.

So far, the Delhi government's approach to cleaning the Yamuna has relied heavily on sewage treatment plants. Over the past year, several of these facilities have been upgraded. However, the latest DPCC data indicate that they are still not adequately equipped to tackle the scale of the river's pollution. More importantly, large parts of the city remain outside the sewer network. Earlier this month, the Delhi Jal Board informed the National Green Tribunal that it is putting systems in place to accurately assess the volume of sewage discharged into the river through the city's major drains. Such systems are long overdue.

The water board also told the tribunal that the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board is working to address delays in connecting settlements to the city's sewage network. Its statement points to a chronic problem. Fragmented institutional responsibilities have long hampered the interceptor drain project, which was meant to capture sewage from smaller drains in the city's slum clusters before it could flow into the larger drains that empty into the Yamuna. Addressing this more than decade-long deficit will be among the many challenges the proposed Water Master Plan must confront. The Delhi government has little time to lose.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context

- The Delhi government has proposed a Water Master Plan to improve water management and address pollution in the Yamuna River.
- Cleaning the 22-km stretch of the Yamuna in Delhi was a major political commitment during the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections.
- The Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) report shows slight improvement in water quality, but pollutant levels remain above permissible limits.
- Large amounts of untreated sewage still enter the river, especially through city drains and areas without sewer connections.

### Key Points

- Major pollution source: Untreated domestic sewage is the primary cause of pollution in the Delhi stretch of the Yamuna.
- Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs): Several plants have been upgraded, but treatment capacity remains insufficient.
- Incomplete sewer network: Many informal settlements and colonies remain unconnected to the sewer system.
- Drain pollution: Major drains carry untreated wastewater directly into the river.
- Seasonal flow issue: Reduced water flow during winter reduces the river's self-cleansing capacity.
- Institutional fragmentation: Multiple agencies (Delhi Jal Board, municipal bodies, urban development agencies) lead to coordination challenges.

### Static Linkages

- Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) and Dissolved Oxygen (DO) are key indicators of river water quality.
- Urban rivers face pollution mainly from domestic sewage, industrial effluents, and solid waste.
- River conservation requires source control, sewage treatment, ecological flow, and basin-level planning.
- Pollution regulation is implemented through central and state pollution control authorities.

### Critical Analysis

Positives

- Proposal of a Water Master Plan indicates long-term planning.
- Upgradation of STPs shows infrastructure improvement.
- Monitoring sewage inflow into drains can improve data-driven policymaking.

Challenges

- High sewage generation vs. limited treatment capacity.
- Large unsewered population in informal settlements.
- Weak institutional coordination among agencies.
- Low ecological flow in Yamuna, especially during lean season.
- Rapid urbanisation increasing wastewater load.

### Way Forward

- Expand sewer network coverage across all urban settlements.
- Increase capacity and efficiency of sewage treatment plants.
- Ensure minimum ecological flow in the Yamuna.
- Strengthen institutional coordination and accountability.
- Promote nature-based solutions such as wetlands and bio-remediation.
- Implement integrated river basin management for the Yamuna.