

# DAILY NEWSP APER ANALYSIS

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**CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY  
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

# Trump hails rescue; Iran says U.S. lost planes

U.S. Air Force officer saved from behind enemy lines in 'daring operation', says U.S. President

Iranians term operation 'a complete failure', say U.S. assets involved in the rescue were destroyed

Iran's critical infrastructure facing destruction if Strait of Hormuz is not reopened, Trump added

Stanly Johny.

A U.S. Air Force officer whose F-15E Strike Eagle fighter jet was shot down in Iran on Friday was rescued by U.S. Special Operations forces in "one of the most daring search and rescue operations in U.S. history" on Saturday night, President Donald Trump said on Sunday.

Iran's military termed the U.S. operation "a complete failure", saying that it destroyed two transport planes, two helicopters, and two drones.

"This brave warrior was behind enemy lines in the treacherous mountains of Iran, being hunted down by our enemies, who were getting closer... At my direction, the U.S. Military sent dozens of aircraft, armed with the most lethal weapons in the World, to retrieve him," Mr. Trump said in a social media post,

adding that no American was killed or wounded in the operation, and that the U.S. has "achieved overwhelming air dominance and superiority over the Iranian skies".

The rescued airman was "seriously wounded", Mr. Trump said in another social media post on Sunday evening. He also wrote another explosive- ridden post repeating his threat of striking Iran's critical infrastructure if the Strait of Hormuz is not reopened.

A spokesperson of Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters said Iranian forces destroyed two U.S. MC-130s and two Black Hawk helicopters which were involved in the rescue operation.

Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, Iran's Parliament speaker, shared an image purportedly showing the charred remains of aircraft on social media, saying: "If the United States gets three



Dusty front: A photo released by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps on Sunday shows aircraft wreckage in central Iran. REUTERS

more victories like this, it will be utterly ruined."

The F-15E, carrying a crew of two military officials, was the first American jet being shot down by Iran since the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Iran on February 28, according to U.S. officials.

The F-15E crew had ejected from the aircraft when it came under fire over

southern Iran on Friday. One of them was rescued in an earlier operation.

An A-10 Warthog aircraft was also hit on Friday over the Persian Gulf with its pilot ejecting before the plane crashed.

A U.S. Air Force UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter that was involved in the first rescue operation was also hit by Iranian fire but it

## Israeli attacks in Lebanon kill at least 11 people

BEIRUT Israeli strikes on south Beirut and its suburbs killed at least four persons on Sunday, a day after Israel threatened to hit Lebanon's main border crossing with Syria, forcing it to close. The Israeli military also carried out deadly attacks on Lebanon's south, one of which killed seven people. » PAGE 14

landed in Iraq, U.S. media reported. The second airman got stuck in mountainous territory in southern Iran for more than 36 hours.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said the "enemy's flying objects were destroyed and the U.S. once again suffered a humiliating defeat". The Iranian military

also claimed that it destroyed two U.S. drones on Sunday—an MQ-9 Reaper and an Elbit Hermes-900—over Isfahan.

"The U.S. Army's so-called rescue operation, which was planned in the form of an immediate escape operation under the pretext of rescuing the pilot of its downed aircraft in an abandoned airport in southern Isfahan, was brought to a complete failure by the presence of the Iranian armed forces," Lt. Col. Ebrahim Zolfagari said on Sunday.

U.S. media reported quoting unnamed officials that the military destroyed two of its MC-130J transport aircraft after they got stuck at a remote base in Iran.

The MC-130J, equipped with advanced sensors, is designed to insert troops into hostile territory and get them out.

Earlier, announcing the

rescue of the airman, Mr. Trump had said: "WE GOT HIM! My fellow Americans, over the past several hours, the United States Military pulled off one of the most daring Search and Rescue Operations in U.S. History, for one of our incredible Crew Member Officers, who also happens to be a highly respected Colonel, and who I am thrilled to let you know is now safe and sound".

"The Iranian Military was looking hard, in big numbers, and getting close. This type of raid is seldom attempted because of the danger to "man and equipment."

The second raid came after the first one, where we rescued the pilot in broad daylight, also unusual, spending seven hours over Iran," the U.S. President said.

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## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- A U.S. F-15E Strike Eagle fighter jet was shot down over Iran amid ongoing hostilities.
- One aircrew member was rescued through a high-risk special operation by U.S. forces.
- U.S. President Donald Trump described the mission as highly successful, while Iran, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, termed it a failure.
- The episode reflects rising direct confrontation and renewed tensions in West Asia, especially around the Strait of Hormuz.

### Key Points

- Aircraft involved:
  - F-15E Strike Eagle – multirole fighter aircraft
  - MC-130J – special operations transport aircraft
  - UH-60 Black Hawk – utility helicopter
  - A-10 Warthog – close air support aircraft
- Operational aspects:
  - Rescue conducted in hostile mountainous terrain.
  - Demonstrates coordination between air power and special forces.
  - Highlights importance of air superiority in modern warfare.
- Geopolitical significance:
  - Strait of Hormuz handles nearly one-fifth of global oil trade.
  - Increasing use of drones and advanced surveillance systems.
  - Conflicting claims indicate information warfare.

### Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz → Connects Persian Gulf to Gulf of Oman; critical energy chokepoint.

- Air superiority → Essential for dominance in modern conflicts.
- Special Operations Forces → Used for covert, high-risk missions.
- IRGC → Parallel military structure with strategic autonomy in Iran.
- West Asia → Region of geopolitical instability affecting global energy and security.

### Critical Analysis

- Strategic Escalation: Direct U.S.-Iran confrontation risks wider regional conflict.
- Energy Security Concerns: Any disruption in Strait of Hormuz may spike global oil prices, affecting India.
- Military Signalling: Both sides projecting strength to establish deterrence.
- Information Warfare: Contradictory narratives complicate objective assessment.
- Global Stability: Increased chances of involvement of major powers.

### Way Forward

- Promote diplomatic engagement through multilateral forums like the UN.
- Strengthen international cooperation for securing maritime routes.
- Develop global norms for emerging warfare technologies (e.g., drones).
- Encourage confidence-building measures to avoid escalation.

# Swim or sink: reptile 'patrols' likely on Bangladesh border

Vijaita Singh  
NEW DELHI

The field units of the Border Security Force have been directed to explore the feasibility of using reptiles such as snakes and crocodiles in riverine stretches along the Bangladesh border to prevent infiltration and criminal activities, according to an internal BSF communication.

The "use of reptiles is in line with Home Minister Amit Shah's directions", said the signal dated March 26 sent from the BSF headquarters to all field units along the Bangladesh border.

"The feasibility of deploying reptiles (such as snakes or crocodiles) in vulnerable riverine gaps is



to be explored and examined from an operational perspective," it said.

The *Hindu* has seen a copy of the communication.

## Several challenges

There was no response from the BSF. A BSF official

along the riverine stretches?"

The communication followed a February 9 meeting at the Border Security Force headquarters in Delhi.

The BSF is the primary border-guarding force along the Bangladesh and Pakistan borders.

Large parts of the eastern border with Bangladesh are prone to floods, and the topography makes it difficult to erect physical fences.

Since these areas are densely populated, the "use of reptiles" may pose considerable risk to villagers on either side of the border, especially during floods.

According to a March 17 report by the Parliamentary Standing Committee

on Home Affairs, of the total 4,096.7 km border with Bangladesh, the government had approved the fencing of 3,326.14 km.

Of this, 2,954.56 km has been fenced so far. Around 371 km of the total sanctioned border length is yet to be fenced.

**Tough terrain**  
According to the 2024-25 annual report of the Union Home Ministry, the India-Bangladesh border passes through difficult terrain such as hills, rivers and valleys.

"In order to prevent illegal migration and illegal activities, including anti-national activities from across the border, the Government of India has sanctioned phase-wise construction of border

fencing illuminated by floodlights... The non-physical barrier will be in the form of technological solutions. Some problem areas such as riverine/low-lying areas, habitations close to the border, pending land acquisition cases and protests by the border population, have slowed down the installation of fencing in certain stretches on this border," the report said.

The March 26 communication added that border outposts in "dark/no-signal areas" should be identified. "The Eastern Command is to map and identify border outposts (BOPs) located in dark zones lacking mobile network connectivity and furnish detailed inputs for further action," it said.

## Static Concepts to Link

- Border management is a Union subject handled by MHA
- BSF established in 1965 after Indo-Pak war
- Use of force must align with rule of law and human rights principles
- Wildlife governed under Wildlife Protection Act, 1972
- India follows Integrated Border Management (fencing + technology + patrol)

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context

- The Border Security Force (BSF), under the Ministry of Home Affairs, has been directed to examine the feasibility of deploying reptiles (snakes, crocodiles) in riverine gaps along the India–Bangladesh border.
- The directive follows a high-level meeting at BSF Headquarters and is aligned with instructions from Amit Shah.
- The proposal is exploratory in nature and has not yet been implemented.
- It aims to address infiltration and smuggling in unfenced riverine stretches, where traditional fencing is difficult.

### Key Facts for Prelims

- Total India–Bangladesh Border: 4,096.7 km
- Fencing Approved: 3,326.14 km
- Fencing Completed: 2,954.56 km
- Unfenced Portion: ~371 km (mainly riverine/inhabited areas)
- Border Guarding Force: BSF (under Ministry of Home Affairs)
- Challenges in Border Areas:
  - Flood-prone riverine terrain
  - Dense population near borders
  - Land acquisition issues
- Government Approach:
  - Physical fencing + technological solutions (CIBMS)
  - Identification of dark zones (no mobile connectivity)

### Mains Enrichment

Why Such a Proposal?

- Difficulty in constructing fences in riverine and marshy terrain
- Persistent issues of:
  - Illegal migration
  - Smuggling
  - Cross-border crimes

### Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Acts as a natural deterrent in inaccessible areas
- Reduces dependence on costly infrastructure
- Innovative approach to border security

Disadvantages

- Threat to civilians and livestock in densely populated areas
- Uncontrollable during floods → high unpredictability
- Violates environmental ethics and wildlife protection norms
- Raises legal and humanitarian concerns
- Operational impracticality (breeding, monitoring, containment)

### Key Challenges

- Procurement and safe deployment of reptiles
- Ensuring zero harm to local communities
- Coordination with environmental laws
- Maintaining India's international image
- Lack of scientific evidence supporting effectiveness

### Way Forward

- Strengthen Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS)
- Use drones, sensors, AI-based surveillance, satellite monitoring
- Develop floating border outposts (BOPs) in riverine areas
- Increase community-based border management
- Enhance India–Bangladesh cooperation for joint patrolling
- Ensure policy decisions align with environmental sustainability and ethics

# Transforming India's nuclear power landscape

In the 2025-26 Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that India's installed nuclear power generation capacity would rise from 8,180 MW to 100,000 MW (100 GW) by 2047. She also signalled transformative legislative changes, leading to the introduction and rapid passage of the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill in December 2025.

The scope of change envisaged is dramatic. All nuclear activity had hitherto been the exclusive preserve of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE). The SHANTI Act promises a transformation of India's nuclear energy landscape by bringing in private companies to build, own and operate nuclear power plants, provides statutory status to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), and revises the liability framework to encourage private and even foreign investment. The 1962 Atomic Energy Act and the 2010 Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA) stand repealed and replaced by the SHANTI Act (2025).

However, to realise the promise of 100 GW will need putting the nuts and bolts of implementation in place, the notification of supportive rules and regulations, consistent with the transformative spirit underlying the SHANTI Act.

## Driving the reforms

Two key pronouncements drive the reform: achieving Viksit Bharat by 2047 and net-zero emissions by 2070. As society moves up the development ladder, the nature of energy consumption shifts to electricity from traditional modes of transport and heating, fossil fuels for energy and heating, and coal for industry. Consequently, the "net zero" target also imposes a parallel shift away from fossil fuel-based power generation towards renewables and other low carbon options. In 2024, India's per capita electricity generation was 1,418 kWh (kilo-watt-hour) compared to 7,097 kWh for China and 12,700 kWh for the United States. The OECD average is a little above 8,000 kWh. This indicates the distance that India needs to travel to achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat. The second goal of "net zero" imposes its own conditionalities. In 2024, India's per capita energy consumption was 2,893 kWh, indicating that only one-fifth of the energy consumption is from electricity.

In June 2025, India's electricity generating capacity reached 476 GW (giga-watt) and approximately 50% was non-fossil fuel sources. Renewable sources made up 227 GW, consisting of solar power 111 GW, wind power 51 GW, and hydropower 48 GW, with an additional 52 GW from micro-hybrid projects and biomass 12 GW. In addition, nuclear power – which is seen as low carbon and not strictly renewable as it consumes fissile material as fuel – was 8.8 GW. Thermal power, primarily based on coal accounted for 240 GW. India has committed to increasing the



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installed capacity of renewables to 500 GW by 2030. However, the installed capacity does not reveal the full picture. Renewable sources generation depends on the time of day, climatic and seasonal conditions and geography. India generated a total of 1,824 TWh (tera-watt-hours) during 2024-25. Renewable sources accounted for 403 TWh (solar 144 TWh, wind 83 TWh, hydro power 160 TWh and biomass 66 TWh). Nuclear power accounted for 57 TWh while thermal power generation was 1,363 TWh. Thermal power, therefore, accounted for 75% of the electricity generated with 50% of the generating capacity compared to 50% renewables capacity providing 22%, while nuclear power contributed 3% with 1.8% of generating capacity. The reason is that thermal and nuclear sources provide for steady baseload power. For renewables to provide at scale, large investments in energy storage become essential. This is why renewables capacity growth is now facing headwinds with projects of 40 GW languishing without power-purchase contracts.

**India's nuclear power journey and options**  
Conservative estimates indicate that India will need to grow its electricity generating capacity to over 2,000 GW to reach Viksit Bharat levels. Even with more efficient and cheaper battery storage, renewables such as solar and wind farms are about 10 times more land intensive when compared to thermal power plants, since coal is inconsistent with "net zero", nuclear power remains the preferred baseload means to achieve "net-zero".

India's first nuclear power reactor went operational in 1969 in Tarapur. Today, the Nuclear Power Corporation (NPCIL) is managing 24 nuclear power plants with an installed capacity of 6,780 MW (one reactor in Kawahata has been shut down). The two oldest are Boiling Water Reactors (BWR), two at Kudankulam are Russian design VVERs (pressurised water reactor or PWR) and the balance are Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWR). The original design was 220 MW; this has been successfully indigenised and adapted to 540 MW and 700 MW designs.

The DAE budget has averaged between ₹24,000 crore and ₹26,000 crore during the last three years. India's 700 MW PHWR construction cost is \$2 million per MW, among the lowest globally for nuclear power. To add 90 GW over the next two decades would need an outlay of over \$200 billion (₹18 lakh crore), only feasible with private investment, both domestic and foreign.

In 2017, the government gave administrative and financial approval for building 10 reactors of 700 MW each in fleet mode but work has not begun. The logic of fleet mode was to streamline production to gain economies of scale. Three other locations – Jaitapur (Maharashtra), which is planned to have six reactors of 1,650 MW each based on a French (EDF) design, and Mithi Virdi (Gujarat) and Kovvada (Andhra Pradesh), each

planned to have six reactors of 1,000 MW capacity using Westinghouse-Toshiba and GE-Hitachi designs – have been under consideration for over a decade. The likely power generation costs from these unproven designs is likely to be over \$5 million per MW.

Many industries have captive power plants, ranging from 10 MW to 200 MW; most of these are fossil fuel-based. Current estimates for the installed capacity are 90 GW with plants of 100 MW and above accounting for two-thirds capacity. The government has announced ₹20,000 crore to research and develop five indigenously models of Small Modular Reactors (SMR) of 5 MW, 35 MW and 200 MW capacity by 2033. Meanwhile, the indigenised 220 MW PHWR model (S are currently operational), can be a reliable workhorse. With efficient project management, some amount of modularisation, and economies of scale, the time from first pour-of-concrete to going on-stream can be reduced to 40 months. Steel, primary metals, cement, petrochemicals and paper industries, and now, the data centres, have shown interest.

**Three-front nuclear strategy**  
To achieve the 100 GW target requires careful planning across three fronts. The I&P and Westinghouse designs are comparatively new and will need to be indigenised to bring down costs. China has demonstrated this by building a supporting industry base and plans to build 33 reactors of 1,000 MW each at below \$2 million per MW over 10 years. Second, the DAE should identify institutions to accelerate research and development for indigenous SMRs, especially of the molten salt reactor design. Another research area is in the use of Thorium cladding with HALU (High Assay Low Enriched Uranium) that can provide an alternative to the breeder reactor route in order to permit early exploitation of India's thorium reserves. Third, the indigenised 220 MW PHWR model is ready to be modularised as an economically viable replacement for a number of captive power plants; some Indian private sector companies have the requisite design, fabrication and construction experience.

Since nuclear power generation requires high upfront capital costs but low operating costs over a long (60 years) operating life, an appropriate financing model will need to be worked out. Existing exclusion zone regulations, intended for multiple reactors at one site will need to be modified for captive single unit reactors.

Conceptually, the SHANTI Act attempts a division between strategic- and defence-related nuclear activities and the civilian power generation; now, the rules and regulations to be issued must make this clear. Issues of nuclear power tariffs, ownership of nuclear fuel, waste management, insurance and liability, dispute settlement mechanism, and an autonomous regulator will need to be dealt with in a transparent manner. Only then will the SHANTI Act deliver on its promise.

- Focus on:
  - Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)
  - Indigenous PHWR (220 MW, 540 MW, 700 MW)
  - Thorium-based fuel cycle

## Static Linkages

- India's three-stage nuclear programme (Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors → Fast Breeder Reactors → Thorium-based reactors)
- Concept of baseload power vs intermittent energy sources
- Radiation safety, nuclear waste management, and liability principles
- Role of independent regulatory bodies in governance
- Energy security and diversification of energy mix
- India's commitments under Paris Agreement (NDCs)

## Critical Analysis

### Positives

- Helps achieve net-zero emissions target (2070)
- Provides reliable baseload power, unlike renewables
- Reduces dependence on coal and fossil fuels
- Encourages private investment and technological innovation
- Boosts energy security and industrial growth

### Concerns

- High capital costs and long gestation periods
- Nuclear safety risks and disaster concerns
- Issues of radioactive waste management
- Public resistance (land acquisition, environmental concerns)
- Dependence on foreign technology and fuel
- Liability dilution may raise accountability concerns

### Stakeholder Perspectives

- Government: Focus on energy transition and growth
- Private sector: Interested but concerned about risks and returns
- Local communities: Safety and displacement concerns
- Environmental groups: Mixed views (low carbon vs nuclear risks)

## Way Forward

- Develop clear regulatory framework and transparency mechanisms
- Strengthen independent nuclear regulatory authority
- Promote indigenous technology (PHWR, SMRs, thorium reactors)
- Ensure robust safety and waste management systems
- Design innovative financing models (PPP, sovereign guarantees)
- Enhance public awareness and stakeholder consultation
- Integrate nuclear with renewables + storage systems for balanced energy mix

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- Union Budget 2025–26 announced expansion of nuclear power capacity from 8,180 MW to 100 GW by 2047.
- Introduction and passage of the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025.
- Repeal of earlier frameworks:
  - Atomic Energy Act, 1962
  - Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010
- Aim: Enable private and foreign participation, strengthen regulation, and support India's net-zero (2070) and Viksit Bharat (2047) goals.

### Key Points

- India's current nuclear capacity: ~8.8 GW (~1.8% of total capacity).
- Nuclear contributes ~3% of total electricity generation, but provides baseload power.
- Renewable energy:
  - ~50% installed capacity but only 22% generation share due to intermittency.
- Thermal power still contributes ~75% of electricity generation.
- Estimated requirement: >2000 GW capacity by 2047.
- Investment needed: ~\$200 billion (₹18 lakh crore) for nuclear expansion.
- SHANTI Act provisions:
  - Private sector entry in nuclear power generation
  - Statutory status to Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)
  - Revised liability regime to attract investment

# The World Trade Organization is flailing

Trade multilateralism is facing its biggest stress test since the Second World War. The United States' coercive unilateralism and attempts to dilute foundational rules such as the most-favoured nation (MFN) treatment threaten to hollow out the entire system. At such a critical juncture in history, the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s fourteenth Ministerial Conference (MC14), Cameroon (March 2026), was expected to reassure the global community about the importance of a rules-based global trading order, which limits hegemonic tendencies.

Regrettably, the MC14 failed to meet this challenge. While no one expected the MC14 to turn up trumps, the fact that the 166-member WTO failed to reach consensus on even issuing a ministerial declaration outlining future work is disconcerting. To paper over the cracks, the WTO's Director-General announced that the MC14 had produced a Yaoundé package comprising certain draft decisions, that is, decisions yet to be finalised, which will be discussed at Geneva in the months ahead.

## Tale of two moratoriums

The MC14 will go down in history as the one that broke the long-standing consensus on extending moratoriums for two things. First, customs duties on electronic commerce transactions. Since 1998, WTO member-countries agreed not to impose customs duties on electronic commerce transactions to keep digital trade flows free. The moratorium has been extended every two years since its inception. However, at MC14, countries were unable to reach an agreement on extending the moratorium, which, thus, lapsed on March 31. Today, countries are free to impose tariffs on digital trade flows, though it is expected that the WTO's General Council will deliberate on this issue again in the months ahead. While this may provide developing countries with an



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opportunity to augment their revenue, it will burden consumers and businesses. A significant development that accompanied the end of the e-commerce moratorium was the signing of an e-commerce agreement (ECA) by 66 WTO members, which prohibits customs duties on digital trade.

Although not yet part of the WTO rulebook and binding only for the signatories, this agreement will establish two separate legal frameworks: the WTO, which allows tariffs on digital trade, and the ECA, which does not. The second moratorium, in force since 1995, barred non-violation complaints under the WTO's TRIPS Agreement. The WTO allows countries to file claims not only for legal violations but also when a country's measures nullify another country's anticipated benefits, even if those measures are legal.

This raises concerns for developing nations that their laws to promote public health could provoke complaints from developed countries alleging that they nullify the benefits of their intellectual property. Although such complaints are possible, history suggests they are unlikely to succeed, as evidenced by the failure of all 10 non-violation complaints related to trade in goods at the WTO.

## Plurilateral innovation

A so-called low-hanging fruit at the MC14 was the incorporation of the plurilateral Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) agreement into Annex 4 of the WTO Agreement, with support from 129 of 166 countries. However, it did not materialise due to India's opposition. New Delhi opposed the IFD's inclusion for multiple reasons, including the absence of legal safeguards to incorporate plurilateral agreements into the WTO acquis.

Plurilateral agreements to be incorporated into the WTO should be open and inclusive rather

than exclusive. The failure to include the IFD Agreement has deepened the WTO's legislative crisis, as the organisation struggles to establish rules for 21st century challenges.

## No road map for the future

The MC14 failed to provide a clear road map for WTO reforms. Critical issues such as reviving the stalled appellate function of the WTO's dispute settlement system have been postponed. Any attempts by the developed world, especially the U.S., to undermine key principles, such as MFN and the special and differential treatment, must be strongly resisted.

It is often said that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. The history of trade multilateralism demonstrates that whenever trade multilateralism slows, American unilateralism tends to rise. This occurred in the early 1970s when the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations floundered, leading to the enactment of strict measures such as Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974. This provision empowers the U.S. President to take unilateral action against perceived unfair trade practices. We are currently witnessing a similar situation, but this time without Congressional approval and with far greater vengeance. A setback at the MC14 will exacerbate these trends.

Additionally, the failure of the MC14 will accelerate the trend of countries creating new trade rules outside the WTO. To keep the WTO relevant, innovative solutions must be found, such as plurilateralising the WTO. India should take the lead in developing the legal guardrails needed for the development and adoption of plurilateral agreements within the WTO. Achieving this will require a novel approach and unflinching political commitment to trade multilateralism.

*The views expressed are personal*

- Weak Institutional Outcomes No progress on restoring WTO Appellate Body.
- No roadmap for reform of global trade governance.
- Rise of Unilateralism Increasing use of unilateral trade measures (e.g., Section 301 of US Trade Act, 1974).

## Static Linkages

- Principles of Most Favoured Nation (MFN) and National Treatment in global trade.
- Concept of trade multilateralism vs unilateralism.
- TRIPS Agreement and its role in intellectual property rights.
- Evolution from GATT (1947) to WTO (1995).
- Role of dispute settlement mechanism in international institutions.

## Critical Analysis

### Positives

- Opportunity for developing countries to mobilize revenue via digital tariffs.
- Greater flexibility through plurilateral arrangements.
- Space for countries like India to safeguard policy autonomy.

### Negatives

- Weakening of WTO undermines rules-based global order.
- Fragmentation may lead to inequality in trade rules.
- Increased trade barriers may disrupt global value chains.
- Risk to access to medicines due to TRIPS-related disputes.

### Challenges

- Consensus-based decision-making slowing reforms.
- Deadlock in dispute settlement system.
- Geopolitical tensions impacting trade cooperation.

## Way Forward

- Revive WTO dispute settlement mechanism.
- Create inclusive framework for plurilateral agreements.
- Balance digital trade openness with national interests.
- Strengthen role of developing countries in global trade governance.
- India should lead Global South in pushing equitable reforms.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- The 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) of the World Trade Organization held in Yaoundé (March 2026) failed to deliver a consensus-based ministerial declaration.
- The conference was expected to reinforce the rules-based global trading order amid rising unilateral trade actions, particularly by the United States.
- Key longstanding WTO moratoriums—on custom duties on e-commerce (since 1998) and non-violation complaints under TRIPS (since 1995)—faced disruption or uncertainty.
- Attempts to incorporate the Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) agreement into WTO framework failed due to lack of consensus, notably opposition from India.
- The WTO continues to face a structural crisis, including paralysis of its dispute settlement mechanism and lack of reform roadmap.

### Key Points

- E-commerce Moratorium Lapsed Countries can now impose tariffs on digital trade flows.
- May increase revenue for developing nations but raise costs for consumers and businesses.
- Emergence of Parallel Legal Frameworks 66 WTO members signed an E-commerce Agreement (ECA) prohibiting tariffs, creating fragmentation.
- TRIPS Non-Violation Moratorium Uncertain Raises concerns for public health laws in developing countries facing potential disputes.
- Failure of Plurilateral Integration IFD Agreement (supported by 129 countries) not incorporated due to concerns over inclusivity and legal safeguards.

## Elastic rules

### India needs proper reckoning of plastic collection and reuse targets

The latest iterations of India's plastic waste management rules, announced on March 31, suggest that the government has hit a wall in its attempts to curb plastic waste collection and recycling. The Plastic Waste Management Rules, first introduced in 2016, have been amended periodically, reflecting a policy framework in constant evolution. The intent is to make companies that produce and use plastics invest in recycling plastic so that, ultimately, less plastic is wasted and dumped in landfills, rivers, oceans, and public spaces. The paradox is that the same qualities that have made plastic ubiquitous – adaptable to a near infinite range of consumer goods, easy to produce, accessible to the richest and the poorest, and flexible in a way that metal can never be – also make it near impossible to incentivise collection and reuse. This is why the Rules were necessary.

Since 2022, when the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regime came into force, producers, importers and brand owners – makers and users of plastic packaging and raw materials – were required to collect and process plastic waste equivalent to 35% of the plastic they introduced into the market in 2021-22, increasing to 70% in 2022-23 and 100% by 2024-25. The amendments of 2026 bring in new mandates. This time, companies must ensure that recycled content makes up a minimum (and increasing) percentage of their plastic packaging annually. For instance, producers, importers and brand owners must ensure that rigid plastic packaging (Category I) contains at least 30% recycled material, rising to 60% by 2028-29. There are also similar 'reuse' obligations. But, strangely, companies that fail to meet their targets in 2025-26, the gazette notification says, may carry forward the shortfall for up to three years, provided they make up at least a third of the deficit annually. In effect this means that the 2025-26 target can be met in 2028-29. Also, at present, there is no evidence or even a claim by the government that all companies are collecting 100% of their obligations. By the government's own responses to Parliament it hovers from 50%-60%, and yet there are no targets set for 2025 and beyond. This seems to suggest that the government has given up on pushing companies to collect or recycle plastic, or has shifted focus to having them use recycled plastic irrespective of how it is sourced. There are provisions on using 'trading certificates' that suggest the logic is to let market economics decide on what is an environmental problem. Without a proper reckoning of collection and recycling targets, the new targets on reuse, which are already elastic, risk being ignored, thus undermining the intent of the EPR regime.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change notified amendments (March 31, 2026) to the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016.
- The Rules have evolved since 2016, with major strengthening through the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework introduced in 2022.
- EPR mandates producers, importers, and brand owners (PIBOs) to collect and process plastic waste equivalent to the quantity they introduce into the market.
- Targets under EPR increased progressively:
  - 35% (2021–22)
  - 70% (2022–23)
  - 100% (2024–25)
- Latest amendments shift focus toward mandatory use of recycled plastic content and reuse obligations.
- Concerns arise due to weak enforcement, carry-forward provisions, and lack of clarity on actual collection achievements.

### Key Points

- Recycled Content Mandate:
  - Category I (rigid plastic packaging): minimum 30% recycled content (2025–26), rising to 60% by 2028–29.

- Carry Forward Provision:
  - Shortfall in targets can be carried forward up to 3 years.
  - Only one-third of deficit must be met annually → weakens accountability.
- Collection Gap:
  - Government data indicates only ~50–60% compliance with collection targets.
- Absence of Future Targets:
  - No clear collection/recycling targets beyond 2024–25.
- Market Mechanism Introduced:
  - Use of EPR trading certificates to allow flexibility in compliance.
- Shift in Policy Focus:
  - From strict collection/recycling → to use of recycled plastic (irrespective of sourcing).
- Reuse Obligations:
  - Introduced but loosely defined and potentially difficult to enforce.

### Static Linkages

- Directive Principles: State to protect and improve environment (Art. 48A).
- Fundamental Duty: Citizens to protect natural environment (Art. 51A(g)).
- Polluter Pays Principle (Environmental jurisprudence – Supreme Court).
- Sustainable Development and Circular Economy concepts.
- Waste management hierarchy: Reduce → Reuse → Recycle.
- Basel Convention on transboundary movement of hazardous wastes.
- National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) – sustainable consumption.
- Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016.

### Critical Analysis

#### Positives

- Promotes circular economy via recycled content mandate.
- Enhances industry accountability through EPR.
- Introduces economic instruments for efficiency.
- Reduces dependence on virgin plastic.

#### Concerns

- Carry-forward provision dilutes compliance.
- Lack of reliable data on plastic waste collection.
- Weak enforcement of 100% EPR targets.
- Shift away from core objective of waste collection.
- Risk of greenwashing through certificate trading.
- Informal waste sector remains under-recognised.

### Way Forward

- Define clear post-2025 EPR targets.
- Strengthen monitoring via digital tracking systems.
- Restrict carry-forward flexibility.
- Integrate informal waste pickers into formal system.
- Promote biodegradable and alternative materials.
- Strengthen urban local bodies for waste management.
- Ensure strict audit of EPR certificates.

## Balance is key

Equitable development is crucial as Amaravati becomes A.P. capital

As Parliament passed a law last week recognising Amaravati as the capital of Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu scored a decisive political victory. When he broke ground for Amaravati on June 6, 2015, it was not without controversy. About 217 square kilometres of fertile farmland along the Krishna river were envisaged to be consolidated for a capital city that Mr. Naidu hoped would rival Hyderabad – a city on which he had expended considerable political and administrative capital. Trouble came early. These lands supported thriving agrarian communities, dominated by Kammas – a powerful landholding community to which Mr. Naidu belongs and which forms a key support base of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). The process was routed through the Land Pooling Scheme (LPS), seen by critics as a way to circumvent the 2013 land acquisition law. The LPS, however, found acceptance among landowners, who were promised annuities for 10 years and developed residential and commercial plots. But agricultural labourers received only modest monthly assistance – initially ₹2,500 – along with limited skill-development support. Environmental concerns and perceptions that Rayalaseema and north coastal Andhra were being neglected added to the resistance.

Mr. Naidu had expected that the revenue-deficit State would receive sustained financial support from the Centre, particularly since the TDP was then a key ally of the BJP. This did not materialise. The demand for Special Category Status – promised in Parliament by then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh but not incorporated into the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 – became a potent political issue that the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP), led by Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, successfully leveraged in the 2019 election. Mr. Reddy's government too faced criticism for halting Amaravati works and proposing a three-capital model, which ran into legal and political challenges. By 2024, with Mr. Naidu returning to power, the State, backed by a more accommodative Centre, had moved to revive Amaravati. The Centre has committed support for capital infrastructure largely through loans from multilateral agencies and financial institutions, with its direct contribution remaining modest. The result is a waste of public resources over a project that ought to have been substantially completed within a decade. Political brinkmanship should not exacerbate uncertainty during periods of transition. What is crucial now is balance. As Amaravati's development regains momentum, the State must ensure that historically underdeveloped regions are not sidelined. Equally, while landowners may see gains, agricultural labourers may be left behind.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- Parliament has passed a law formally recognising Amaravati as the capital of Andhra Pradesh.
- The capital project was originally launched in 2015 by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu.
- Around 217 sq. km. of fertile agricultural land along the Krishna River was pooled for the project.
- The project faced opposition due to:
  - Use of Land Pooling Scheme (LPS) instead of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013
  - Environmental concerns and regional imbalance
- The subsequent government under Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy proposed a three-capital model, halting Amaravati's progress.
- With regime change in 2024, Amaravati project has been revived with support from the Centre and multilateral funding.

### Key Points

- Land Pooling Scheme (LPS): Voluntary land contribution by farmers in return for developed plots + annuities
- Seen as an alternative to compulsory acquisition under LARR Act

- Compensation Structure: Farmers: Annual payments for 10 years + commercial/residential plots
- Agricultural labourers: Limited assistance (~₹2,500/month initially)
- Regional Concerns: Perception of neglect of Rayalaseema and North Coastal Andhra
- Financial Aspects: Limited direct central funding; reliance on multilateral loans (World Bank, AIIB-like institutions)
- Andhra Pradesh remains a revenue-deficit state post-bifurcation (as per 14th Finance Commission)
- Political Dimension: Demand for Special Category Status (SCS) became a major electoral issue
- Policy discontinuity led to delay and resource wastage

### Static Linkages

- Federal structure allows states to choose their capital (Article 3 implications indirectly)
- Land acquisition governed by consent, compensation, R&R provisions under 2013 Act
- Concept of cooperative federalism (NITI Aayog framework)
- Urban planning principles:
  - Sustainable development (Brundtland Report)
  - Smart Cities Mission guidelines
- Regional imbalance and inclusive growth (Economic Survey insights)
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) norms under Environment Protection Act, 1986

### Critical Analysis

#### Positives

- Planned capital → investment, employment, urban growth
- LPS reduces conflict vs forced acquisition
- Symbol of state identity post-bifurcation

#### Negatives

- Exclusion of agricultural labourers (equity concern)
- Loss of fertile land → food security risk
- Regional imbalance (Rayalaseema, North Coastal Andhra neglected)
- Policy instability → delays, fiscal burden
- Environmental risks (floodplain development)

### Way Forward

- Ensure inclusive R&R (include labourers, tenants)
- Promote balanced regional development (multi-capital or decentralisation)
- Maintain policy continuity in infrastructure projects
- Adopt sustainable urban planning
- Strengthen Centre-State fiscal coordination
- Transparent governance and monitoring

# How to fast-track reservation for women in Parliament — a roadmap

THE GOVERNMENT'S decision, reported in the media, to convene additional sittings of Parliament to debate amendments to the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, is a welcome and significant step. It signals that a historic reform has now entered the difficult phase of implementation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi deserves full credit for accomplishing what had eluded Parliament for nearly three decades. The passage of the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, providing one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, was a landmark step. For 26 years, the proposal remained stalled. Its enactment demonstrated political will.

But every reform must answer one question: How will it be implemented?

Current discussions suggest that the strength of the Lok Sabha may be increased from 543 to about 816 seats — an addition of 273 seats. If this entire block of additional seats is reserved for women, it would immediately ensure that one-third of the enlarged House is composed of women, without displacing existing members.

Yet one basic issue remains unaddressed: Where will women come from?

New seats require constituencies. Constituencies can only be created through delimitation. And delimitation, by law, can only follow a Census. The next Census is expected after 2026. Even if everything moves quickly, the publication of data, the constitution of a Delimitation Commission, and the completion of its work will take several years. Past experience suggests that delimitation cannot be completed before 2032 or 2033.

This creates a simple difficulty. If constituencies do not exist, elections cannot be held. Without delimitation, there is no electoral map within which

reservation can operate.

There is also another constitutional issue. The Constitution itself freezes the allocation of seats among states until after the first Census conducted after 2026. Any attempt to change this arrangement earlier would require another constitutional amendment and may reopen the sensitive question of representation between the northern and southern states.

The Home Minister has tried to address this concern by saying that the balance between the northern and southern states will be maintained, and that any increase in seats will be proportional across states. In the absence of a better formula, this approach appears most reasonable. Yet it must be recognized that proportionality preserves ratios, not influence. Larger states will still gain more seats in absolute numbers. Parliament votes by numbers, not by proportions. Even so, since no alternative has yet been suggested, this may be the most acceptable compromise for now.

But even if this issue is set aside, the central question remains: How will women contest elections without constituencies?

There is a way forward.

We need not assume that every Member of Parliament must come from a territorial constituency. Many democracies combine constituency-based elections with proportional representation. Some members are elected from constituencies, while others are chosen on the basis of vote share of political parties



S Y QURAISHI

for women. These seats need not be linked to constituencies. Instead, they can be allocated to political parties or alliances in proportion to their vote share.

If one applies the broad pattern of the last general election, the ruling alliance would receive the largest share of these seats, followed by the principal opposition alliance, with the rest going to other parties. Within each alliance, seats can then be distributed among constituent parties.

This ensures that representation reflects the mandate of the electorate, while also maintaining political stability. No party or alliance is unfairly disadvantaged.

After the election, each party's or alliance's vote share would determine its share of these additional seats. Parties would nominate women from pre-declared lists. This would ensure fairness, transparency, and predictability.

This approach solves the main problem. Women's reservation can be implemented without waiting for delimitation. No constituency needs to be created.

It has other advantages. It reflects the will of voters more accurately, since it is based on vote share. It lowers the barriers that women candidates face in costly elections. In effect, it is an election with zero additional cost.

It is important to clarify that reservation is a minimum guarantee, not a ceiling. Women will continue to contest and win from general constituencies; the additional seats are over and above this number.

The new Parliament building, designed to accommodate a much larger House of up to 888 members, offers an opportunity that did not exist earlier. Whether or not this was envisaged at the time, the infrastructure and capacity are now in place. With both political will and institutional

readiness available, there is little reason to defer implementation for another decade.

If this approach is accepted, women's reservation can be implemented as early as the 2029 general election without waiting for delimitation. Indeed, there is no constitutional principle that requires us to wait even that long. Once Parliament accepts proportional allocation, additional seats for women can be created and filled on the basis of the most recent electoral mandate. A constitutional promise need not wait for the next election cycle to be honoured.

In fact, the logic of the proposal permits an even earlier step. The additional seats could be introduced in the current Lok Sabha itself, through a constitutional amendment, using the vote shares of the most recent general election. This would immediately enhance women's representation without disturbing the existing mandate. What is required is not another election, but a decision. This may sound radical or revolutionary but it is doable.

All it requires is a constitutional amendment. Parliament has already shown that it can act. The Constitution has already been amended to recognise women's right to representation; it can be amended again to ensure that this right is not delayed.

This arrangement need not be permanent. It can operate for one or two elections. Once delimitation is completed, constituencies can be redrawn and seats can be reserved within the normal electoral system, should that be the choice.

What is at stake is not a technical detail; it is the credibility of a constitutional promise. The House has already been built. The question is whether we are ready to fill it.

Quraishi is former chief election commissioner of India and author of Democracy in Heartland: Inside the Battle for Power in South Asia

Many democracies combine constituency-based elections with proportional representation. Some members are elected from constituencies, while others are chosen on the basis of vote share of political parties

- Constitutional constraint:
  - Seat allocation freeze among states until post-2026 Census.
- Political concern:
  - Balance between northern and southern states' representation.

## Static Linkages

- Universal Adult Franchise (Art. 326)
- Equality before Law (Art. 14)
- Affirmative Action (Art. 15(3))
- Reservation in Local Bodies (73rd & 74th Amendments)
- Delimitation Commission (Art. 82, 170)
- Basic Structure Doctrine (representation & democracy)
- First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) vs Proportional Representation (PR)
- Census and federal distribution of seats
- Women's political participation (NCERT Polity)

## Critical Analysis

### Positives

- Promotes inclusive democracy and gender justice.
- Builds on success of local body reservations.
- Likely to improve quality of governance and representation.

### Challenges

- Delay in implementation due to Census-delimitation linkage.
- Federal concerns over seat redistribution.
- PR-based interim model may weaken:
  - constituency linkage
  - accountability
- Risk of elite capture within parties.

## Way Forward

- Expedite Census and delimitation process.
- Consider interim constitutional mechanism for early rollout.
- Ensure transparent and fair seat allocation formula.
- Strengthen capacity building of women leaders.
- Maintain federal balance through consensus.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- Parliament passed the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, providing one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.
- The reform ended a ~26-year legislative deadlock, marking a major step in political empowerment.
- However, implementation challenges remain due to linkage with delimitation and Census.
- Delimitation can only occur after the first Census post-2026, delaying operationalisation possibly till 2032–33.
- Debate has emerged on alternative mechanisms (e.g., proportional representation-based additional seats) to implement reservation earlier.

### Key Points

- Provides 33% reservation for women in:
  - Lok Sabha
  - State Legislative Assemblies
- Reservation will also apply to SC/ST reserved seats.
- Implementation is conditional upon:
  - Delimitation exercise
  - Post-2026 Census data
- Proposal under discussion:
  - Increase Lok Sabha strength (e.g., from 543 to ~800+ seats).
  - Allocate additional seats exclusively for women.
- Alternative model suggested:
  - Use Proportional Representation (PR) for allocating additional seats based on vote share.

# Climate cooperation offers a way out of energy price chaos



SIMON STIELL

**A**S THE head of UN Climate Change, I'm used to making the case for clean energy. Today, the latest fossil fuel energy crisis is doing that job for me. War in the Middle East has exposed a brutal truth: Fossil fuel dependency rips away countries' sovereignty and security, putting food prices, household budgets, business bottom lines, and entire economies at the mercy of geopolitical shocks. In a world of "might is right" politics, the costs of fossil fuel subservience are spiralling out of control.

The latest conflict has unleashed what the International Energy Agency has called "the greatest global energy security threat in history", constricting oil and gas supplies and sending prices soaring. Inflation inevitably follows, with higher bills for families and businesses. The impacts are reverberating around the world, with Asia deeply affected as it imports 40 per cent of its oil through the Strait of Hormuz. The World Food Programme predicts that the war could push global hunger to record levels this year.

Some argue that the correct response to the current crisis is to slow the shift to renewable energy, and instead double-down on the cause of the turmoil — fossil fuels. This defies economic logic and basic common sense. With geopolitics in disarray, energy price chaos will keep happening. Continued dependence on fossil fuels would leave countries forever lurching from crisis to crisis.

With geopolitics in disarray, energy price crises will keep happening. Continued dependence on fossil fuels would leave countries forever lurching from crisis to crisis

It would also mean our planet keeps heating up, supercharging climate disasters like mega storms, droughts and floods. These are already ruining millions of lives. In 2025 alone, severe flash floods devastated parts of India and Nepal. If temperatures keep rising unchecked, this will only get worse. And yet the cause — fossil fuels — continues to receive trillions of dollars in subsidies globally.

The good news is there is a clear solution to both the climate crisis and the fossil fuel cost crisis: Accelerating the shift to clean energy systems where renewables supply the power, backed by modern grids and storage, and clean technologies, like EVs, replace polluting alternatives.

Sunlight and wind don't depend on vulnerable shipping straits. Clean energy allows nations to insulate their economies from global turmoil, while creating jobs, cutting pollution, improving health and lowering costs. Renewable power is the cheapest there is.

Many countries are already seizing these benefits and protecting themselves from climate disasters. But others need support. Over \$2 trillion flowed into clean energy last year — twice as much as fossil fuels — but very little went to vulnerable developing economies. That must change urgently. Richer countries — and the financial institutions they control — have every incentive to ensure that affordable finance flows to developing nations for climate action. Because a truly global shift benefits us all.

In our interconnected global economy, climate disasters hammering supply chains are a major inflation driver for every country. But through climate cooperation, countries are creating an alternative to the strong-arm politics dominating international affairs.

At UN Climate Change, we're supporting this cooperation. Our annual conferences, have driven major progress — roughly halving the projected rise in global temperature, transforming global energy markets and supporting resilience-building. But we need to go far faster, and to ensure a just transition, including for economies and communities that have historically relied on fossil fuels.

The quicker countries move, the greater the gains. Climate cannot wait. So, we're increasingly focused on turning climate commitments into real-world outcomes that benefit billions more people. Last year at COP30 in Brazil, \$1 trillion was committed to grids and storage, to invest in modern, clean energy systems. This year's COP31 in Türkiye will drive further progress.

Today's turmoil underscores the urgency of this work. Climate cooperation is a cure for the chaos of this moment. Clean energy and climate resilience are essential, not despite global instability, but because of it.

*The writer is executive secretary of UN Climate Change*

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- The ongoing geopolitical conflicts, especially in the Middle East, have triggered a global fossil fuel energy crisis.
- International Energy Agency termed the situation as the "greatest global energy security threat in history."
- Heavy dependence on fossil fuels has exposed countries to supply disruptions, price volatility, and inflationary pressures.
- Asia remains highly vulnerable, importing nearly 40% of its oil via the Strait of Hormuz.
- World Food Programme warns of rising global hunger due to energy-driven food price inflation.
- The crisis has renewed the debate between continuing fossil fuel reliance vs accelerating clean energy transition.

### Key Points

- Fossil fuel dependency undermines energy security and sovereignty of nations.
- Geopolitical tensions directly affect oil & gas supply chains, leading to inflation.
- Fossil fuels continue to receive trillions in global subsidies despite climate risks.
- Renewable energy (solar, wind) is now cheapest source of power (IEA reports).
- Over \$2 trillion invested in clean energy globally (2024–25), but limited flow to developing countries.

- Clean energy transition includes:
  - Renewable power generation
  - Grid modernization and storage
  - Electrification (e.g., EVs)
- Climate disasters (floods, droughts) are intensifying due to continued fossil fuel use.
- Global climate negotiations like COP30 and COP31 aim to accelerate transition.

### Static Linkages

- Greenhouse effect and global warming (NCERT Geography & Science)
- Energy resources: renewable vs non-renewable (NCERT Class 10 Geography)
- External sector vulnerability due to oil imports (Indian Economy – Economic Survey)
- Environmental degradation and disasters (NCERT + Disaster Management)
- Sustainable development and intergenerational equity
- Government subsidies and fiscal burden (Economics)

### Critical Analysis

#### Positives of Clean Energy Transition

- Enhances energy security by reducing import dependence
- Reduces carbon emissions, helping meet Paris Agreement targets
- Generates green jobs and innovation opportunities
- Improves public health by reducing air pollution

#### Concerns / Challenges

- High initial investment costs in infrastructure and storage
- Intermittency issues (solar/wind variability)
- Developing countries face finance and technology gaps
- Fossil fuel-dependent regions face just transition challenges (job losses)

#### Stakeholder Perspectives

- Developed nations: Focus on rapid decarbonization
- Developing nations: Demand climate finance & equity
- Oil-exporting countries: Economic dependence on fossil fuels
- Vulnerable populations: Bear disproportionate climate impacts

### Way Forward

- Scale up climate finance (as per \$100 billion commitment under UNFCCC)
- Promote energy diversification (solar, wind, green hydrogen, nuclear)
- Strengthen grid infrastructure and storage systems
- Ensure just transition policies for affected workers and regions
- Reform fossil fuel subsidies and redirect funds to clean energy
- Enhance international cooperation through UN climate frameworks
- Encourage domestic initiatives like National Solar Mission, Green Hydrogen Mission

# Polls in a warming world call for heat safety protocols



MAHAVEER  
GOLECHHA

**I**N RECENT years, India has witnessed a distinct rise in heatwaves, impacting public health, the environment, and social cohesion. According to World Bank estimates, by 2030, more than 200 million people in India will experience high temperatures annually, and 30 million will lose their jobs due to reduced productivity caused by heat-related stress.

From a public health perspective, this year's summer holds particular significance as it coincides with the assembly elections in April. The IMD has warned that several parts of the country may experience hotter-than-average days this summer. Public safety during outdoor events must be a government priority. Community awareness, effective heat and health communication strategies, efficient early warning systems and community-led preparedness are among the most effective strategies.

These elections coincide with the transition from the current El Niño phase — which typically causes heat and aridity — to the forecasted La Niña phase, which may influence weather variability, including heat patterns. On election days, overcrowding and a scarcity of shelter facilities could exacerbate heat stress. Given the hardships experienced during last year's summer — when numerous deaths occurred not only due to high daytime temperatures but also humidity — precautionary measures are essential. The deaths of 14 people due to extreme heat at an open-air rally in Navi Mumbai in 2023 are a grim warning.

Consequently, activities must be organised with the impact of the heat in mind. Based on seasonal forecasts provided by the IMD, the ECI has issued heatwave advisories. Drawing on NDMA guidelines, the ECI has released a comprehensive list of "Dos and Don'ts" regarding heat safety. When attending such gatherings, it is crucial to carry an adequate supply of water and an umbrella and to avoid prolonged exposure to the outdoors. The ECI has issued additional regulations for rallies.

It is also vital to adopt preventive measures to remain fit and healthy throughout the process. Having simple, light meals daily helps maintain optimal energy levels and prevent dehydration. One should steer clear of junk food and deep-fried items, as these require a significant amount of water for processing.

When participating in large gatherings, individuals should wear light, loose-fitting cotton clothing, as well as wide-brimmed hats or caps and sunglasses. In case of symptoms such as dizziness, weakness, anxiety, intense thirst, or headaches, it is advisable to seek assistance at the nearest healthcare facility. People should avoid prolonged exposure to the heat — particularly during the hottest part of the day. Community-based NGOs should raise awareness among the public, specifically the elderly, youth, pregnant women, and outdoor workers.

In an election season amidst extreme weather conditions, the health and safety of every individual must be given top priority.

*The writer is a health policy expert*

The IMD has warned that several parts of the country may experience hotter-than-average days this summer. Public safety during outdoor events must be a government priority

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- India is experiencing increasing frequency and intensity of heatwaves due to climate change.
- IMD has forecast above-normal temperatures in several regions during the current summer.
- The situation coincides with assembly elections, raising concerns over public safety during mass gatherings.
- As per World Bank estimates, by 2030:
  - ~200 million Indians will face extreme heat annually.
  - ~30 million jobs may be lost due to heat-related productivity decline.
- Past incidents (e.g., heat-related deaths during public rallies) highlight the urgency of preparedness.
- Transition from El Niño to La Niña may influence heat patterns and weather variability.

### Key Points

- Heatwaves increase risks of:
  - Heatstroke, dehydration, mortality
  - Reduced labour productivity
- Vulnerable groups:
  - Elderly, children, pregnant women
  - Outdoor workers (construction, agriculture)
- Government measures:
  - IMD early warnings and forecasts
  - ECI heatwave advisories and guidelines
  - Based on NDMA Heatwave Action Plan framework

- Preventive strategies:
  - Hydration, light clothing, avoiding peak heat hours
  - Awareness campaigns and community participation
- Economic impact:
  - Loss of productivity → impact on GDP and informal sector

### Static Linkages

- Heatwaves as a natural hazard under disaster management.
- ENSO (El Niño–La Niña) and its impact on Indian climate.
- Article 21 – Right to life includes health and safety.
- Article 47 – Duty of State to improve public health.
- Urban heat island effect and environmental degradation.
- Climate change impacts on labour productivity (Economic Survey).

### Critical Analysis

- Positives:
  - Early warning systems improving preparedness
  - ECI integrating climate concerns into elections
  - NDMA guidelines provide framework
- Challenges:
  - Poor implementation at grassroots level
  - Lack of infrastructure (shade, water, cooling spaces)
  - High vulnerability of informal workforce
  - Low public awareness
  - Urban heat island effect

### Way Forward

- Strengthen Heat Action Plans at local level
- Ensure basic facilities at polling stations (water, shade, medical aid)
- Integrate climate resilience into governance and elections
- Expand early warning dissemination systems
- Promote urban cooling strategies (green cover, cool roofs)
- Provide social protection for heat-affected workers
- Enhance community awareness and NGO involvement

# It's time to insulate food from oil shocks

**I**NTERNATIONAL FOOD prices are barely one per cent up year on year, according to the latest FAO Food Price Index for March. That's as against the nearly 58 per cent increase in the average price of Brent crude for March 2026 over March 2025. It makes the current US-Israel versus Iran crisis somewhat different from the one triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine four years ago. The FAO index touched a record of 160.2 points in March 2022, when Brent prices also spiked to a 14-year-high of \$139.1 during that month. Likewise, in 2008 — the year when Brent scaled its all-time-high of \$147.5 per barrel on July 11 — there was an oil as well as food price shock. This time round, there has been no food crisis — so far.

In India, retail prices of most food items — rice, wheat, pulses, sugar, potato, onion and tomato — are virtually unchanged from last year's levels at this time. The exception is edible oils, where India is hugely import-dependent. Landed prices of imported crude palm, soyabean and sunflower oil, at about \$1,300, \$1,400 and \$1,450 per tonne, are higher than their corresponding year-ago range of \$1,100-1,200. The FAO's sub-index for vegetable oils, too, was 13.2 per cent up in March over the same month of 2025. A major driver here is the amenability of palm and soyabean oil to blending with diesel, and the increased probability of such diversion from elevated global energy prices. Indonesia plans to launch B50 — conventional diesel containing 50 per cent fatty acid methyl ester derived from palm oil — from July 1. The world's largest palm oil producer already has a mandatory 40 per cent biofuel blend programme. Others, such as the US, are also likely to ramp up their biofuel mandates, whether from soyabean oil or maize.

The biofuel link isn't the only reason food prices cannot stay decoupled from oil prices for too long. This is not simply an oil shock, but a full-fledged energy shock whose effects are being felt even in fertilisers and intermediates for crop protection chemicals. Their availability is a concern for the upcoming planting season, including that of kharif crops in India. The comfortable global and Indian stocks of grain for now may not be so down the line if farmers aren't able to meet the agrochemical requirements for their crops. Even worse would be if the war does not end soon and is followed by an El Niño event. Proactive management of stocks and supplies, and keeping the import window open, is the only strategy to deal with such extreme uncertainty.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- Global food prices, as per the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) index, rose only ~1% in March 2026 (YoY), despite a sharp ~58% rise in Brent crude oil prices.
- The ongoing geopolitical tensions involving United States, Israel, and Iran have triggered an energy shock but not yet a food crisis.
- This contrasts with earlier crises such as the Russia-Ukraine war and the 2008 global commodity shock, where food and oil prices surged together.
- In India, most food prices remain stable, except edible oils due to import dependence.

### Key Points

- Decoupling of Food & Oil Prices (Temporary) FAO Food Price Index stable vs sharp rise in crude oil prices.
- Past trends show strong correlation (2008, 2022 crises).
- Edible Oil Inflation India heavily import-dependent (~55–60% of consumption).
- Prices of palm, soybean, sunflower oil increased significantly.
- FAO vegetable oil index up ~13.2% YoY.
- Biofuel Diversion Impact Indonesia introducing B50 biodiesel (50% palm oil blending).
- United States increasing ethanol/biodiesel mandates.

- Food crops diverted toward fuel → supply constraints.
- Energy Shock Beyond Oil Fertilisers (urea, DAP) and agrochemicals linked to energy prices.
- Supply chain disruptions may affect upcoming kharif season.
- Future Risks Decline in crop productivity due to input shortages.
- Possible El Niño may worsen food output.
- Current buffer stocks may not sustain prolonged crisis.

### Static Linkages

- MSP mechanism and buffer stock policy (Food Corporation of India).
- Concepts of cost-push inflation and imported inflation.
- Energy-agriculture nexus (fertiliser production uses natural gas).
- Biofuel policy (National Biofuel Policy, Ethanol Blending Programme).
- Monsoon dependency and ENSO effects on Indian agriculture.

### Critical Analysis

- Pros Short-term food price stability → inflation control.
- Adequate grain stocks provide buffer.
- Cons Food-fuel trade-off (biofuel expansion).
- High fertiliser costs → lower productivity.
- Import dependence (edible oils) → external vulnerability.
- Climate risks may amplify crisis.
- Key Issue Temporary decoupling likely to reverse due to structural linkages between energy and agriculture.

### Way Forward

- Reduce edible oil import dependence (NMEOP-OP).
- Calibrated biofuel blending to avoid food inflation.
- Ensure fertiliser availability via subsidy + diversification.
- Strengthen buffer stock management and supply chains.
- Promote climate-resilient agriculture.
- Keep trade channels flexible (timely imports).

# Mothers require better healthcare, not just access

A STUDY published in *The Lancet Obstetrics, Gynaecology & Women's Health* last week has underscored the successes of the country's maternal health programme. But it has also flagged a worrying slowdown in progress since 2015. Maternal mortality in 2023 was nearly a fifth of what it was in 1990. The steepest decline occurred in the first decade and a half of this century, driven largely by more effective government interventions, a rise in institutional deliveries, and greater public awareness. Yet, India still accounts for one in 10 maternal deaths globally, and the report highlights persistent systemic challenges that stand in the way of meeting the Sustainable Development Goal of reducing maternal mortality to 70 deaths per lakh births by 2030. Pregnant women continue to die due to haemorrhages, infections, and blood pressure-related disorders.

The Covid pandemic exposed the fragility of India's maternal health programme. Frontline workers were diverted to meet the crisis, institutional deliveries were delayed and antenatal visits fell. The government has shown awareness of the challenge. It has strengthened programmes like LaQshya to improve the quality of care in labour rooms. The Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan has emphasised the use of online portals and a greater role for anganwadi workers in tracking the health of pregnant women. However, implementation remains uneven. Health is a state subject, and the efficacy of the government's programmes depends on local administrative capacity and political will. While Gujarat, Maharashtra, and the states in South India are on track to meet the SDG goal, government reports and the *Lancet* study highlight gaps in the healthcare systems of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, and Assam.

Addressing these deficits requires a decisive shift in strategy. Strengthening primary and secondary healthcare systems is essential so that complications are detected early and managed promptly. Functional emergency transport systems, well-equipped labour rooms, availability of specialists, and access to blood banks can mean the difference between life and death. At the same time, policies focused solely on expanding healthcare infrastructure will fall short unless they account for the social determinants of health. It's well-known that large sections of women eat last and their nutritional requirements are not met, leading to anaemia and poor health outcomes. The *Lancet* report's message on a comprehensive strategy that combines improving healthcare with increasing the social agency of women should not be lost on policymakers.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- A recent study published in *The Lancet Obstetrics & Gynaecology* highlights India's progress in reducing maternal mortality.
- Maternal mortality in 2023 is about one-fifth of 1990 levels, indicating long-term improvement.
- However, progress has slowed since 2015, raising concerns.
- India still contributes ~10% of global maternal deaths.
- The report flags challenges in achieving the SDG target of MMR  $\leq 70$  per lakh live births by 2030.

### Key Points

- Major causes of maternal deaths:
  - Haemorrhage
  - Infections
  - Hypertensive disorders (e.g., eclampsia)
- Drivers of earlier success (2000–2015):
  - Increase in institutional deliveries
  - Government interventions like Janani Suraksha Yojana
  - Improved awareness and access to healthcare
- Recent concerns:
  - Slowdown in reduction rate post-2015
  - Regional disparities:
    - Better-performing: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Southern states

- Lagging: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, MP, Rajasthan, etc.

- Impact of COVID-19:
  - Disruption of antenatal care
  - Decline in institutional deliveries
  - Diversion of frontline health workers
- Government initiatives:
  - LaQshya Programme – improving labour room quality
  - Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan – antenatal care tracking and outreach
- Persistent systemic issues:
  - Weak primary healthcare in poorer states
  - Lack of specialists, blood banks, emergency transport
  - Gender inequality → malnutrition, anaemia among women

### Static Linkages

- Fundamental Right: Article 21 – Right to life includes maternal health
- Directive Principles: Article 47 – Duty of state to improve nutrition and public health
- Role of ASHA & Anganwadi workers (Integrated Child Development Services - ICDS)
- Concepts:
  - Demographic transition
  - Human Development Index (HDI)
  - Social determinants of health
- National Health Mission (NHM)
- SDG Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being

### Critical Analysis

#### Positives

- Sharp long-term decline in MMR
- Improved institutional delivery coverage

#### Negatives

- Regional inequality
- Implementation gaps (State capacity)
- Neglect of nutrition & gender factors
- Health infrastructure gaps

### Way Forward

- Strengthen primary healthcare & referral systems
- Improve emergency obstetric care & blood availability
- Focus on nutrition (anaemia reduction)
- Enhance women's education & decision-making power
- Better Centre–State coordination
- Data-driven monitoring (digital tracking)