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CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH

SC tells EC that voting is a sentimental right

Poll body departed from promise to leave voters on 2002 rolls untouched during the SIR, says SC

We did not find logical discrepancy cases in Bihar; this is a question of fairness, says Justice Bagchi

Robust appellate process needed for excluded voters as EC purging names was unilateral: SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday told the Election Commission of India (EC) that the right to be on the electoral roll and to vote in one's own country is not only constitutional but sentimental.

The top court was referring to lakhs of voters excluded for "logical discrepancies" and lining up for appeal hearings in West Bengal, hardly 10 days ahead of the Assembly election, following an "inquisitorial" special intensive revision (SIR).

The court said 34 lakh appeals by voters purged from the West Bengal electoral roll have already been filed for hearing before 19 appellate tribunals and there were over a lakh appeals pending before each of these tribunals.

The poll body had frozen the electoral roll for the State on April 9, days ahead of the polling on April 23 and 29.

After months of interventions to make the SIR more inclusive, the top court made cutting remarks about the impact of an exercise the poll body said was necessary to "purify the electoral roll".

"The right to remain on the electoral roll, the right to vote in the country you are born in is something which is not only constitutional but sentimental. It is the biggest expression of nationality and patriotism that you are in a participatory process to elect a democratic government," Justice Joymalya Bagchi, part of the Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, said while addressing the poll body.

Senior advocate Dama Seshadri Naidu, for the poll body, said "statistics" proved West Bengal did not "stand out" and was "on par" with other States in the number of exclusions.

'Question of fairness'

"We are not bothered about West Bengal 'standing out'. But no other State has a category called 'logical discrepancy'. We have examined Bihar, we did not find a single person flagged for logical discrepancy... This is not a question of inflating or shrinking the EC, but of fairness," Justice Bagchi said.

The judge noted that the court had permitted the poll body to embark on an inquisitorial exercise mindful of the latter's concern about the electoral rolls. "The original SIR notification said voters in the 2002 electoral roll would not be touched. The 2002 roll would be the benchmark. But when you introduced 'logical discrepancy', you infracted that rule," Justice Bagchi told the poll body.

Mr. Naidu said voters who could prove their credentials were retained. Those with disparity in their names or other background details were asked to provide details, which were verified.

"A voter in the 2002 roll was not required to give anything... When the Bihar SIR was argued, and the Bihar SIR was a facsimile of the SIR we are dealing with today, the EC was unequivocal when it submitted that a person in the 2002 voter list does not have to prove anything. No uploading of documents was required... And then you deviated from your original arguments," Justice Bagchi said.

Uncertain atmosphere

So far, the Supreme Court had avoided any direct criticism of the SIR.

Justice Bagchi referred to how the exclusion of voters in the name of logical discrepancy came "so close" to the date of election in West Bengal that the top court had to step in and deploy judicial officers to hear out the objections. This was all the more reason why the appeal process must not be hurried, the judge said.

The Supreme Court judge said the top court wanted a robust appellate process in place for the excluded voters as the purging of names from the list by the EC was a "*suo motu*" and unilateral process. This was followed by a "verification" of identity documents during the objections phase of the SIR, and not exactly a hearing.

"The appellate process must be robust... somewhere we are getting blinded by the dust and fury of an impending election... We need to protect the due process rights of the voters," Justice Bagchi said.

Ballot proof

While the EC had frozen the West Bengal electoral rolls on April 9, the top court noted that 34 lakh appeals have been filed before 19 tribunals across the State

Ruling awaited: People gather to appeal before a tribunal over issues related to the SIR in Murshidabad, West Bengal, on Monday. PTI

"It is the biggest expression of nationality and patriotism that you are in a participatory process to elect a democratic government"

JUSTICE JOYMALYA BAGCHI
Supreme Court Judge

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Supreme Court of India raised concerns over exclusion of voters from electoral rolls in West Bengal ahead of Assembly elections.
- The issue arose due to a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) conducted by the Election Commission of India.
- Around 34 lakh voters were excluded citing "logical discrepancies" and filed appeals before tribunals.
- Electoral rolls were frozen on April 9, just days before polling (April 23 & 29).
- The Court emphasized that the right to vote and remain on electoral rolls is both constitutional and sentimental.

Key Points

- Mass Exclusion: ~34 lakh voters removed; over 1 lakh appeals pending per tribunal.
- New Category Introduced: "Logical discrepancy" used as a ground for exclusion—questioned by Court.
- Deviation from Past Practice: Earlier, voters in 2002 electoral roll were exempt from verification; deviation noted.
- Judicial Concern:
  - SIR termed "inquisitorial" and "unilateral".
  - Lack of adequate hearing before exclusion.
- Timing Issue: Exercise conducted very close to elections → created uncertainty.
- Court Directive: Need for a robust appellate mechanism and protection of due process rights.

Static Linkages

- Universal Adult Franchise under Article 326.
- Representation of the People Act, 1950 & 1951 provisions on electoral rolls.
- Independence and powers of constitutional bodies under Article 324.
- Principles of Natural Justice (Audi Alteram Partem).
- Basic Structure Doctrine: Democracy and free & fair elections.

Critical Analysis

Positives / Justifications

- Ensures purity and accuracy of electoral rolls.
- Helps remove duplicate/fake entries.
- Strengthens electoral integrity in the long run.

Concerns / Issues

- Arbitrary criteria ("logical discrepancy") lacks legal clarity.
- Violation of natural justice (no proper hearing before exclusion).
- Timing before elections affects democratic participation.
- Administrative burden: tribunals overwhelmed → justice delayed.
- Risk of disenfranchisement of marginalized groups.

Stakeholders

- Voters (especially vulnerable populations)
- Election Commission
- Judiciary
- Political parties
- Civil society

Constitutional Dimensions

- Right to vote (statutory but linked to democracy).
- Article 14 (Equality before law) concerns.
- Free & fair elections as basic structure.

Way Forward

- Clear legal definition and guidelines for voter exclusion criteria.
- Ensure pre-deletion notice and hearing for all affected voters.
- Strengthen digital and transparent verification systems.
- Conduct revisions well before elections, not immediately prior.
- Increase number of appellate tribunals for timely redressal.
- Parliamentary oversight or reforms in Representation of People Acts.
- Promote voter awareness and facilitation mechanisms.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Food prices push retail inflation up to 3.4% in March

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Retail inflation inched up to 3.4% in March from 3.21% February, mainly due to an uptick in prices of certain food items, show data released on Monday. The food inflation, based on the consumer price index (CPI), was estimated at 3.87% as against 3.47% in February. This remains below the Reserve Bank of India's median target of 4%.

The data released by the National Statistics Office is based on a new series with a base year 2024.

High inflation was noticed during March in gold and silver jewellery, coconut (copra), tomato, and cauliflower. On the other hand, inflation was in negative in onion, potato, garlic, arhar dal, and chickpeas, according to the NSO data.

The CPI was at 1.65% in 'electricity, gas and other fuels' segment during March as against 1.52% in the preceding month. Inflation rates for rural and urban segments are 3.63% and 3.11%, respectively. Housing inflation rate for March 2026 was 2.11%.

Highest inflation was in Telangana at 5.83% and the lowest in Mizoram at 0.66%.

Food inflation, based on the consumer price index, was estimated at 3.87% as against 3.47% in Feb.

Commenting on CPI data, ASSOCHAM President Nirmal K. Minda said the government's approach to manage prices by keeping petrol and diesel rates unchanged, despite a sharp rise in international crude oil prices, is highly commendable.

The RBI has also supported economic activity by maintaining a stable repo rate, he added.

ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said the CPI inflation rose slightly to 3.4% in March over February, indicating a mild initial impact of the West Asian crisis on the headline number. "The sequential uptick in year-on-year inflation was driven by food and electricity, gas and other fuels groups, with the latter reflecting the impact of the West Asia crisis across LPG and alternate fuels," she said.

NSO collects real-time price data from selected 1,407 urban markets (including online markets) and 1,465 villages covering all States/U.T.s.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Retail inflation (CPI-based) rose marginally to 3.4% in March 2026 from 3.21% in February 2026.
- Food inflation increased to 3.87% (from 3.47%), driven by select food items.
- Inflation remains below the 4% target set by the Reserve Bank of India.
- Data released by the National Statistics Office is based on a new CPI series (Base Year: 2024).
- Slight inflationary pressure linked to West Asia geopolitical tensions affecting fuel costs.

Key Points

- Headline CPI Inflation: 3.4% (within RBI tolerance band of 2–6%).
- Food Inflation: 3.87%
  - High inflation: gold, silver, tomato, cauliflower, copra
  - Negative inflation: onion, potato, pulses (arhar, chickpeas)
- Fuel & Light Inflation: 1.65% (impact of LPG & alternate fuels)
- Housing Inflation: 2.11%
- Rural vs Urban Inflation:
  - Rural: 3.63%
  - Urban: 3.11%
- State-wise Variation:
  - Highest: Telangana (5.83%)
  - Lowest: Mizoram (0.66%)
- Policy Context:
  - Stable repo rate maintained by RBI
  - Government held fuel prices stable despite global crude rise

Static Linkages

- CPI measures price change in consumption basket (base year revision improves accuracy).
- Inflation targeting framework under Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) (4% ±2%).
- Food inflation linked to agricultural supply chains, MSP, buffer stocks.
- Fuel inflation linked to global crude prices & exchange rate (import dependence ~85%).
- Core inflation excludes food & fuel → indicator of demand-side pressures.
- Role of NSO in data collection (rural + urban sampling methodology).

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Inflation within target → macroeconomic stability
- Decline in key food items → improved supply conditions
- Stable monetary policy → supports growth

Concerns

- Rising food inflation → structural agricultural inefficiencies
- Fuel inflation risk → external vulnerability (geopolitics)
- Regional disparities → uneven price distribution
- Essential commodities inflation impacts poor households disproportionately

Way Forward

- Strengthen agricultural logistics and storage infrastructure
- Enhance buffer stock and price stabilisation mechanisms
- Reduce energy import dependence (renewables, diversification)
- Improve inflation monitoring and forecasting systems
- Ensure policy coordination between RBI and Government

CIVILS WITH AKASH

The fallout of the crisis in West Asia on India's economy

C. Rangarajan

Former Chairman, Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council and Former Governor, Reserve Bank of India

D. K. Srivastava

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While the Russia-Ukraine war shows no sign of abatement, another major crisis in West Asia has hit the global economy. This war has disrupted production, storage, and transport of various energy products including crude oil, natural gas and fertilizers, and has led to supply disruptions and increase in sectoral prices. There is a serious, although partial, blockade of the Strait of Hormuz thereby restricting the passage of crude oil, gas and other petroleum products as well as other goods. Even if matters get resolved in the near future, it may take considerable time for the normalisation of the supply chain. However, even the temporary ceasefire that has been agreed to has brought down the Brent crude oil price from $109.3 per barrel as on April 7 and 8, to about $95.

India has been diversifying its sources of imported crude oil, gas and fertilizers. At present, India is importing crude oil from 41 source countries. In fact, India's dependence on imported crude has been increasing in recent years and it is presently close to 90%.

The relevant crude price index for India is the Indian crude basket comprising Sweet grade (Brent) and Sour grade (Oman and Dubai average), which remains linked to the global crude oil price (average of Brent, WTI and Dubai). Considering the average of March 2026, the Indian crude basket was about 19% higher than the global crude price. The rise in the price of the Indian crude basket in March 2026 was over 64.5% that of February 2026 on average, even though the price increase for end-users were moderated.

With the temporary ceasefire, the Indian basket has come down to $120.28 per barrel on April 9, 2026 from the peak of $157 per barrel on March 23, 2026 – that is by a margin of $37/bbl.

Multiple stressors

The impact on the Indian economy will come through several channels. First is supply disruptions. Supply bottlenecks will affect production processes primarily in energy intensive sectors. However, any disruptions in these sectors would cascade into other sections of the economy, with the affected industries likely being textiles, paints, chemicals, fertilizers, cement and tyres among others. The non-availability of fertilizers and other chemicals particularly would affect the agricultural output in the Kharif season which will start from June.

Secondly, logistics. Storage and transport are highly energy intensive. Increased logistics costs will lead to the increase in the prices of all final products through cascading.

Third, Indian exports will take a hit from both demand and supply sides. The demand side will be affected not only due to disruptions in West Asia but also due to a slowdown in other countries, including the U.S. and Europe. The share of India's merchandise exports to West Asian countries was 16.4% of total merchandise exports in 2024-25. The depreciation of the rupee, that is already underway, may partially help Indian exporters.

Fourth, exchange rate and remittances will be affected. The Indian rupee has been depreciating in recent months. The rate of depreciation has accelerated after the start of the West Asian crisis. As global crude prices, and the prices of fertilizers and other energy products also increase, there would be an additional demand for the dollar and other hard currencies; the exchange rate will be under pressure. Moreover, India receives a considerable number of remittances from Indians employed in the Gulf countries. These remittances are bound to go down, adding further pressure on the exchange rate. However, any improvement in the overall environment may lift the rupee.

In fact, the sharp decline in the value of the rupee has been caused mainly by the substantial capital outflows triggered by uncertainty and fear. When the war ends, the value of the rupee will also rise. The net Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) outflows in March 2026 amounted to $13.6 billion, which is huge.

Fifth, is the current account deficit. The fall in the volume of Indian exports is expected to be accompanied by an increase in the value of Indian imports leading to an increase in the current account deficit, if the war continues. Sixth is rising inflation. Cost push inflation would affect relative prices in sectors that are directly affected such as petroleum products, fertilizers etc. However, if liquidity also increases, there would be pressure on overall inflation. The country needs to avoid any large liquidity increases.

And finally is the fiscal deficit problem. The Government of India may have to provide additional subsidies to Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) as it insists on keeping retail prices at present levels. While to some extent, the reduction in excise duty on petrol and diesel would reduce losses for the OMCs, it would be a direct revenue loss to the Indian government. If real GDP growth goes down and profit margins fall for major producers, there will be an adverse impact on the government's tax revenues. State finances will also be affected due to lower economic activity. Their share in tax devolution would be adversely affected if the Central government's tax revenues go down. States may also face pressure to reduce sales tax/VAT on petroleum products. In fact, the government must rethink the reduction in excise duty on petroleum products. The present move is due to the ongoing State elections. After that, the retail prices should go up, if the war resumes. In that situation, the higher price may constrain demand which is desirable.

Myriad policy responses

As per information shared by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) chairman on March 27, the fortnightly loss on account of lower excise duties on petrol and diesel will be ₹7,000 crore whereas there would be a gain of ₹1,500 crore per fortnight on account of export tax on Aviation Turbine Fuel. This implies a net loss of ₹5,500 crore per fortnight, translating into an annual loss in tax revenue of about ₹1,32,000 crore for the government, should the crisis continue for the full year.

In all likelihood, food, fertilizers and petroleum subsidies would be higher than their budget estimates for 2026-27. As already mentioned, retail prices must be allowed to go up so long as crude prices remain high.

Although it is difficult to estimate the quantitative impact of the current crisis, some impacts were given by the RBI in its October 2025 Monetary Policy Report. In their estimates, for every 10% increase in the price of the Indian crude basket from a baseline of $70 per barrel, that is an increase of $7 per barrel, real GDP growth may fall by around 15 basis points. Further, assuming full pass-through to domestic product prices, inflation would be higher by 30 basis points.

As on April 9, 2026, the price of the Indian crude basket at $120.28 per barrel has exceeded the baseline by about $50 per barrel. If this margin of increase becomes applicable for the whole year, real GDP growth may fall from baseline estimates by 1 percentage point and inflation may increase by more than 2 percentage points. While these effects would be lower if the crisis gets resolved quickly, much depends upon when true peace will dawn.

Views expressed are personal.

The non-availability of fertilizers and other chemicals would affect the agricultural output in the Kharif season which will start from June

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia, alongside the Russia-Ukraine War, have disrupted global energy supply chains.
- Partial blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has affected crude oil, natural gas, and fertilizer movement.
- Brent crude prices spiked to ~$109/barrel (April 2026) before easing to ~$95 after a temporary ceasefire.
- India's crude import dependence is ~90%, with imports from ~41 countries.
- Indian crude basket peaked at $157/bbl (March 2026) before falling to ~$120/bbl (April 2026).

Key Points

- Supply ShockDisruptions in energy, fertilizers, and chemicals supply chains.
- Impact on sectors: textiles, cement, chemicals, tyres.
- Logistics Cost PushEnergy-intensive transport and storage costs rising → cascading inflation.
- Trade Impact16.4% of India's exports go to West Asia (2024–25).
- Demand slowdown in US & Europe worsens export outlook.
- Exchange Rate PressureRupee depreciation due to higher import bills and capital outflows.
- FPI outflows: $13.6 billion (March 2026).
- Remittances RiskGulf remittances may decline → CAD pressure.
- Fiscal ImpactExcise duty cuts → revenue loss (~₹1.32 lakh crore annually).
- Rising subsidies (food, fertilizer, petroleum).
- Inflation & GrowthAs per Reserve Bank of India:
  - 10% oil price rise → GDP ↓ 15 bps, Inflation ↑ 30 bps.
- Current levels may reduce GDP growth by ~1% and raise inflation by >2%.

Static Linkages

- India's energy security depends on import diversification and strategic reserves.
- Current Account Deficit widens when imports > exports.
- Cost-push inflation arises due to increase in input prices (oil, fertilizers).
- Exchange rate depreciation linked to capital outflows and trade imbalance.
- Fiscal deficit increases with subsidies and reduced tax revenues.

Critical Analysis

Pros

- Diversification of crude sources reduces concentration risk.
- Temporary fall in oil prices gives short-term relief.

Cons

- High import dependence → structural vulnerability.
- Inflationary pressures affect poor households.
- Fiscal stress due to subsidies and tax cuts.
- Agriculture impacted via fertilizer shortages.

Challenges

- Balancing inflation control with growth.
- Managing CAD and exchange rate volatility.
- Ensuring uninterrupted energy supply.

Way Forward

- Promote renewable energy & green hydrogen.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Rationalize fuel taxation.
- Boost domestic fertilizer production.
- Strengthen diplomatic ties in West Asia.
- Improve energy efficiency in logistics & industry.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Reclaiming Ambedkar for a modern Andhra Pradesh

History has a tendency to reduce towering figures into narrow symbols. B. R. Ambedkar has often been confined to the role of a sectional *Neta*, when in truth he was the principal architect of modern India's moral and constitutional imagination. To remember him is not to ritualise his legacy, but to apply it.

Ambedkar warned us that while equality may be aspirational, it must nonetheless guide governance. The test of that principle lies not in rhetoric, but in whether the State actively dismantles structural inequality. In Andhra Pradesh, this meant reimagining public education, healthcare, and governance not as welfare, but as instruments of dignity.

Improving access

For decades, government schools stood as quiet markers of neglect. By upgrading infrastructure and introducing English as a medium of instruction, the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) government sought to break both material and linguistic barriers that historically limited social mobility through its flagship program, Nadu-Nedu. Access to education is not merely about enrolment; it is about ensuring that every child learns in an environment that affirms their worth, and where quality education is not confined to private schools. The same logic applies to public health. Ambedkar understood that dignity is impossible without physical security. A single medical emergency should not have the power to push a family into generational poverty. The YSRCP government provided expanding access to healthcare and strengthened State responsibility as essential steps towards ensuring that vulnerability would not define destiny.

The establishment of Grama Sachivalayas in every village, and the mapping of 50 to 60 households to a volunteer delivering various government services at the doorsteps of citizens, reflects the true essence of Grama Swaraj.

Moreover, Ambedkar's contribution to women's rights remains underappreciated. His resignation over the stalled Hindu Code Bill was not a political manoeuvre; it was a moral stand for gender equality. Policies framed by the YSRCP government placed financial resources directly in the hands of women through Direct Benefit Transfers in recognition of the foundational truth that social justice is incomplete without economic agency. When mothers are empowered, the benefits extend far beyond the household, reshaping the trajectory of entire communities. The 50% reservation for women in local bodies, nominated posts, and work contracts paved the way for equality and self-reliance.

Taking inspiration from Babasaheb's words that small farmers must not be left to the mercy of moneylenders, the YSRCP government greatly strengthened the rural economy with the slogan "seed to sale." The Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs) in every village provides services such as e-crop booking, free crop insurance, farm mechanisation, assured remunerative prices, and timely input subsidies, with special focus on tenant farmers. Scheduled Tribe farmers were granted RoFR pattas, giving them access to all government benefits.

The importance of remembrance

Commemoration, too, must move beyond symbolism. Public memory requires visibility. Establishing a major memorial to Ambedkar – a 206-foot 'Statue of Social Justice' at the Ambedkar Smriti Vanam in Vijayawada – during the YSRCP government's tenure was not simply about honouring a leader, it was about embedding his ideas into the physical and cultural landscape of the State. The decision to rename a district after him, however, met with violent resistance from some sections of the remnant feudal elements in society, including attacks on the homes of YSRCP party leaders and former ministers. It reflected a deeper shift: the assertion that social justice must occupy not just discourse, but geography.

Ambedkar was also a sharp critic of the social stagnation embedded in traditional village structures. He saw industrialisation and economic mobility as pathways out of entrenched hierarchies. For a State like Andhra Pradesh, which boasts a 1,053 km coastline, this insight has contemporary relevance. The YSRCP government's efforts to develop ports, fishing harbours, fish landing centres, and logistics infrastructure were not merely an economic strategy; they were a means of expanding economic opportunity and connecting people to a wider world.

Anchored in institutions

At the same time, Ambedkar's enduring warning about constitutional morality cannot be ignored. Governance must be anchored in institutions, not personalities; in law, not vendetta. Any drift towards the selective application of justice or the targeting of dissent weakens the very foundation he helped build. The Constitution is not just a legal document, it is a moral commitment to fairness, restraint, and accountability; one that no "Red Book" should ever replace. The Constitution must remain the only sacrosanct principle for governing a State.

Ambedkar's life was defined by persistence in the face of resistance. Efforts to expand inclusion will always encounter those invested in preserving the status quo. Yet retreat is not an option. The responsibility of governance is to continue converting public policy into pathways of opportunity, especially for those historically left behind. Following Babasaheb in letter and spirit, the YSRCP government supported extending coverage under the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order to Dalits irrespective of the religion they choose.

To reclaim Ambedkar is to recognise that social justice is not a finished project. It is an ongoing endeavour which is demanding, imperfect, and necessary. The measure of our commitment lies not in how often we invoke his name, but in how consistently we advance his vision.

Y. S. Jaganmohan Reddy

Former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh

Ambedkar's life was defined by persistence in the face of resistance. Efforts to expand inclusion will always encounter those invested in preserving the status quo

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- A recent policy discussion evaluates the application of B. R. Ambedkar's ideas of social justice, equality, and constitutional morality in governance.
- Focus on welfare and governance initiatives undertaken by the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party government in Andhra Pradesh.
- Highlights include reforms in education, healthcare, decentralised governance, women empowerment, and agriculture support systems.
- Raises concerns regarding institutional integrity, constitutional morality, and sustainability of welfare policies.

Key Points

- Ambedkarite Principles in GovernanceEquality and dignity as core State obligations
- Social justice through public policy (not symbolic measures)
- Emphasis on constitutional morality
- Education & HealthSchool infrastructure upgradation and English medium
- Strengthening public healthcare to reduce out-of-pocket expenditure
- Decentralised GovernanceGrama Sachivalaya system for last-mile delivery
- Household-level service outreach
- Women EmpowermentDirect Benefit Transfers to women
- 50% reservation in local governance
- Agriculture & Rural EconomyInstitutional support via Rythu Bharosa Kendras
- Focus on tenant farmers and tribal land rights
- Economic DevelopmentPort-led growth and coastal infrastructure
- Fisheries and logistics sector expansion
- IssuesFiscal burden of welfare schemes
- Politicisation of welfare and legacy
- Institutional weakening concerns

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before law
- Article 15 – Prohibition of discrimination
- Article 38 – Social order for welfare
- Article 47 – Public health
- 73rd Constitutional Amendment – Panchayati Raj
- Constitutional morality (Ambedkar's debates)
- DBT & JAM Trinity (Economic Survey)

Critical Analysis

Pros

- Strengthens inclusive governance
- Improves last-mile delivery
- Enhances human capital (education & health)
- Promotes women-led development

Cons

- Fiscal sustainability concerns
- Risk of political capture of welfare
- Weak institutional accountability
- Implementation inefficiencies

Way Forward

- Ensure institutional governance over personality-driven politics
- Balance welfare with fiscal prudence
- Strengthen monitoring (CAG, social audits)
- Improve targeting using data-driven systems
- Uphold constitutional morality

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Hungary for change

Magyar's win may reverse hard-right domestic and foreign policies

The voter's verdict in Hungary, that ousted Victor Orban, Hungary's Christian-nationalist, populist and hard-right Prime Minister with a record 20 years in power (1998-2002 and 2010-2026) and four previous consecutive electoral wins, is unambiguous. According to the latest results, opposition leader Peter Magyar's Tisza party has won about 138 seats, to Mr. Orban's Fidesz party's 55. The massive two-thirds majority in the Hungarian parliament is enough to help Mr. Magyar overturn many of the Orban-era shifts on education and health, judicial independence, and the controversial NER (Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere) or National Cooperation System that the opposition said had led to an economic downturn, widespread corruption and crony capitalism, as well as an anti-European Union stance. Mr. Magyar, who was a Fidesz party leader until just two years ago when he quit the ruling party in protest of its policies and set up his own political movement, is unlikely to reverse Mr. Orban's anti-immigrant policies, however. Ahead of the polls, Victor Orban was endorsed by three powerful leaders, all seen as aggressors in recent conflicts – U.S. President Donald Trump, who even sent Vice-President J.D. Vance to address a public rally with Mr. Orban in Budapest last week; Russian President Vladimir Putin; and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whom Mr. Orban supported unequivocally. Hungary actually quit the International Criminal Court after it issued a warrant against the Israeli Prime Minister for war crimes. It remains to be seen whether post-Orban Hungary turns its course on the wars in Iran, Ukraine or Gaza.

Most significantly for the world, that saw the rise of many populist leaders through elections in the 2010s, Hungary's election verdict denotes that voters worldwide may be tiring of the hard-right, anti-pluralistic, anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric they favoured. Similar outcomes have been seen in elections in Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, the U.K. and Poland. Such trends also provide a check to the authoritarian single-party rule that a whole range of leaders have tried to implement using illiberal policies, politically motivated cases against the opposition, the denigration of democratic institutions and a clampdown on free speech. Mr. Magyar has his work cut out if he aims to reverse these policies in Hungary. The real test of a democratic leader is not just winning elections, but in pursuing inclusive policies, representational of the entire population and providing accountability for their actions, long after forming the government.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- In Hungary, long-serving Prime Minister Viktor Orban was voted out after nearly two decades in power.
- Opposition leader Peter Magyar secured a two-thirds majority in Parliament with his Tisza party.
- The electoral verdict reflects public dissatisfaction with:
  - Weakening of democratic institutions
  - Alleged corruption and crony capitalism
  - Anti-European Union stance
- The result is part of a broader global trend indicating voter fatigue with right-wing populism and illiberal governance.

Key Points

- Hungary follows a parliamentary system; a two-thirds majority enables:
  - Constitutional amendments
  - Structural institutional reforms
- Features of Orban-era governance:
  - Concept of "illiberal democracy"
  - Curtailment of judicial independence and media freedom
  - Centralisation under the NER (National Cooperation System)
- Implications of the verdict:
  - Potential restoration of checks and balances
  - Re-alignment with European Union norms and policies
- Global relevance:
  - Strengthens the idea of electoral accountability
  - Shows limits of authoritarian populism within democratic frameworks

Static Linkages

- Rule of Law (Dicey): Equality before law, absence of arbitrariness
- Separation of Powers: Checks and balances among organs of government
- Constitutionalism: Limited government under a legal framework
- Electoral Democracy: Free and fair elections as core feature
- Liberal vs Illiberal Democracy (Political Theory)
- Role of supranational institutions (EU, ICC)

Critical Analysis

Positive Dimensions

- Reinforces democratic accountability through elections
- Opportunity to restore institutional independence
- Promotes pluralism and inclusive governance
- Indicates resilience of democratic systems

Negative Dimensions

- Transition may create policy uncertainty
- Persistent political polarisation
- Institutional rollback may face administrative resistance

Key Challenges

- Reversing entrenched structural changes
- Addressing corruption and governance deficits
- Balancing domestic priorities with international commitments

Way Forward

- Strengthen independent judiciary and oversight institutions
- Ensure transparency and anti-corruption measures
- Promote inclusive and participatory governance
- Safeguard media freedom and civil liberties
- Align governance with rules-based democratic norms

CIVILSWITHAKASH

Parched again

Bengaluru is treating water supply as infinitely expandable

While Karnataka as a whole is improving its water security, Bengaluru is dealing with extreme groundwater withdrawal. The State drew 66% of the groundwater that it could sustainably extract in 2025, but Bengaluru East Taluka drew 378%. The sustainably extractable volume of groundwater is based on how much withdrawal will deplete the aquifer, so while 378% does not mean Bengaluru East has depleted its groundwater, it is reminiscent of an ongoing crisis that has, once again, turned acute. The Bengaluru region lies on crystalline rock that already stores little water and recharges slowly. The city further concentrates demand in areas with higher population density and per-capita consumption, including 'tech parks' and apartment complexes. The built-up area of such urban infrastructure also suppresses recharge by percolating rainwater. A growing fraction of the population depends on water from the Cauvery, which comes with a high expansion cost. Thus, the problem has a natural basis but has been compounded over the years by inconsiderate urbanisation, where the costs – monetary and, increasingly, existential – are being passed on to the populace.

In 2024, a weak monsoon left nearly half of Bengaluru's 14,000 borewells dry. The government launched a project to supply 775 million litres per day to 110 villages and lower groundwater stress. But to date, the project has achieved only midway coverage, leaving many residents still banking on tankers. A 2026 study found that the crisis has since moved to Koramangala and Hebbal. The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board has also been using treated sewage water to recharge lakes. It seems Bengaluru is treating supply as infinitely expandable when it is not. Its preference for grey over green infrastructure has sealed the ground against replenishment while the increasing demand liquidates ecological capital. The city does not manage its pipeline supply, groundwater, and wastewater together, allowing consumers to default to the most convenient solution: tankers. Authorities need to minimise distribution losses and penalise overextraction and mandate 100% decentralised wastewater recycling for all non-potable uses. The ideal long-term solution remains unchanged: Bengaluru needs to become a 'sponge city'. This includes restoring the connections between lakes and wells to capture monsoon runoff, thus aligning land-use planning with the recharge capacity of each taluka, and overall sealing the ground less and increasing absorption on the surface.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the Issue

- Karnataka shows moderate groundwater extraction (66%), but Bengaluru East Taluka shows extreme over-extraction (378%) in 2025.
- Weak monsoon (2024) led to ~50% of borewells drying, intensifying the crisis.
- Dependence on Cauvery water and private tankers is rising.
- Crisis is spreading to newer urban areas such as Koramangala and Hebbal.
- Indicates structural urban water mismanagement, not just climatic variability.

Key Points

- Groundwater Over-extractionExtraction beyond recharge → long-term aquifer stress.
- 378% extraction signals unsustainable usage.
- Geological ConstraintsBengaluru lies on hard crystalline rocks → low porosity and slow recharge.
- Urbanisation ImpactConcretisation reduces percolation of rainwater.
- Loss of lakes and wetlands weakens natural recharge systems.
- Water Governance IssuesFragmented management of surface water, groundwater, and wastewater.
- Inefficient distribution → high losses (Non-Revenue Water).
- Current Measures775 MLD water supply project (partially implemented).
- Use of treated wastewater for lake recharge.

Static Linkages

- Groundwater is a common pool resource with risk of "tragedy of commons".
- India is the largest groundwater extractor globally (World Bank, FAO).
- Aquifer types: Unconfined vs confined; hard rock aquifers have low porosity.
- Hydrological cycle: Recharge depends on precipitation, infiltration, evapotranspiration.
- Urban floods vs water scarcity paradox due to poor drainage and recharge systems.
- Rainwater harvesting mandated under various State laws.
- Atal Bhujal Yojana (Ministry of Jal Shakti) – community-led groundwater management.
- National Water Policy (2012) – emphasises integrated water resource management (IWRM).

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Wastewater reuse promotes circular water economy.
- Expansion of piped supply reduces tanker dependence (partially).

Challenges

- Severe groundwater depletion in urban pockets.
- Over-reliance on external sources (Cauvery).
- Weak enforcement of rainwater harvesting norms.
- Inequality in access (rich vs tanker-dependent poor).
- Lack of integrated water management framework.

Ethical Concerns

- Intergenerational equity compromised.
- Environmental justice issues in water access.

Way Forward

- Adopt Sponge City model:
  - Restore lakes, wetlands, and drainage channels
  - Increase permeable surfaces
- Ensure 100% wastewater recycling for non-potable use
- Strict regulation of groundwater extraction
- Reduce distribution losses (NRW)
- Promote rainwater harvesting at scale
- Implement Integrated Urban Water Management (IUWM)
- Align urban planning with hydrogeological capacity

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Before Noida, protests in Barauni, Surat, Manesar

Labour Codes did not meet workers' expectations: labour leaders; Noida workers seeking parity with Haryana

Pratyush Deep, Ravi Dutta Mishra, Aanchal Magazine & Asad Rehman
New Delhi, April 13

Several trade union leaders alleged the authorities have not been paying adequate attention to the demands of the contract workers

BEFORE NOIDA on Monday, industrial workers had protested in Barauni in Bihar, Surat in Gujarat, and Manesar and Panipat in Haryana, demanding better working conditions, higher minimum wages, and better overtime payments.

Workers have been disappointed at the less-than-expected increases in wages after the implementation of the Labour Codes in November 2025, and their distress has been worsened by the increase in the black-market price of cooking gas cylinders due to the war in West Asia.

The protest in Noida came after the Haryana government on April 9 revised the minimum wages with effect from April 1, 2026. The last revision happened on October 21, 2015.

The first workers' protest was seen in Barauni, an industrial town in Bihar, on February 2 over the revision of minimum wages and setting of working hours at eight hours a day, along with demands for social security provisions such as provident fund and coverage under the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC).

Similar protests also took place across other refineries, including at Indian Oil Corporation Ltd's Panipat refinery on February 23, where at least 30,000 contractual workers staged protests demanding better wages and working conditions.

The protest turned violent with angry workers throwing stones at security personnel and vandalising vehicles.

Days later, on February 27, a protest by 5,000 contract workers of Larsen & Toubro (L&T) working at the AM/NS (ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel) project site at Hazira, Surat, turned violent.

Several policemen sustained injuries and vehicles were set on fire.

With the shortages of LPG cylinders that have sent the cost of living higher, protests since March have been reported in industrial areas of Surat, Manesar and Noida.

Workers have been asking for additional support for the purchase of LPG cylinders, the cost of which has risen 3-4 times in the black market. This has increased the existing clamour for an increase in minimum wages. Workers in Noida have been demanding a 35% increase in their minimum wages, in line with last week's minimum wage hike by the Haryana government.

Several trade union leaders alleged the authorities have not been paying adequate attention to the demands of the contract workers who have been protesting in Noida since Friday. Instead, they have put leaders of trade unions under house arrest.

"*Aab workers ke saath saara nahin hogi toh woh baat kaise samjhenge* (When there is no conversation between workers and the authorities, how will they understand)? The protests are happening across industries – garments, IT, and call centres. The workers are aware of the new Labour Codes and are demanding worker rights in line with those. The minimum wage was last revised in 2012, and they are demanding a hike now," Naeem, AITUC district secretary, Noida, said.

Siddhanth Raj, a trade union activist, said the protest in Noida was mainly influenced by the similar protest in Manesar by workers of the automotive sector. "There was an expectation of better wages from April 1 due to the new labour codes. However, that did not happen. This has led to the present protest in industrial hubs in Noida," Raj told *The Indian Express*.

Textile unit owners said they had sought police protection.

"Workers have turned violent... We have suspended factory operations and have asked workers to leave. If police are not deployed, we will remain closed indefinitely. This kind of protest is happening after 10-12 years," Anil Peshawari, managing director of Noida-based Meenu Creation, told *The Indian Express*.

Thousands of workers threw stones, smashed cars and set several of them on fire in Noida's industrial sectors. EPS

Workers encouraged by Haryana's revision of minimum wage, anger fuelled by social media

Drishti Jain & Upasika Singhal
Noida, April 13

WORKERS WHO began dharnas at factories in Noida on Friday were upset that their counterparts in Haryana had been promised higher wages for the same work, several protesters told *The Indian Express* on Monday morning.

The four-day-old protest by workers escalated on Monday and quickly degenerated into vandalism and arson across Noida's industrial belt. Following labour unrest in Manesar, Haryana, the Haryana government last Thursday issued a notification revising minimum wages with effect from April 1, 2026.

Anuj Kumar (20), who said he had been hired by a garment export unit named Richa Global through a contractor, said workers had taken up the issue with the general manager and human resources manager of the unit in Noida on Friday. Richa Global has operations in Gurgaon as well. "We work for the same company, why are we paid differently? I earn Rs 11,000 a month, and the salary of workers in Manesar has increased to Rs 18,000. We got to know this through our friends and social media," Anuj said.

Security personnel at the protest site. HARIKISHAN CHHOLDERA

"They (the company representatives) said our wages would be increased by Rs 361 from the salary of April, and that we should raise this matter with the government and not with the company," he said.

On Saturday, the Uttar Pradesh government announced a series of measures for workers' welfare, including mandatory double overtime pay and timely wages. A representative of Richa Global declined to comment.

On Monday, stones were thrown at the gates of the factory of automotive parts manufacturer Motherson in Sector 84.

A large group of workers blocked the road in front of Stasanch Electronics' factory in Sector 83. They let an ambulance and a school bus through, but refused to allow any other vehicles to pass. Protests at both these factories had been ongoing since Friday, workers said.

"We have been asking them to increase our salaries for years," claimed Rahul, who said he does soldering work. "We got to know from social media that some workers in Manesar managed to get a hike in salaries after protesting. We thought if they could do it, so could we," he said.

Workers alleged that Rs 550 was deducted from their salaries every month for an "ITI diploma" which they said they suspected did not exist. "They just make us take tests every year," Rahul said.

Workers complained that rising rents and inflation were squeezing their budgets. Several women workers claimed that conditions inside their workplaces were unhygienic, including only one bathroom for dozens of workers, which was often not kept clean. Others said they were not provided adequate safety equipment.

Who said what

"Remember how 'double-engine' government stood by your side during Covid. Be wary of those who incite unrest"
YOGI ADITYANATH, UTTAR PRADESH CM

"Four suspected terrorists were recently held from Meerut, Noida with links to Pakistan-based handlers. Agencies are probing the possible conspiracy angle to disrupt law and order."
ANIL RAJBHAR, UP LABOUR MINISTER

"The BJP's 'double-engine' has turned into a 'trouble-engine' for the public. The people will dismantle the wheels of all these engines, pull out the parts and send them to the scrapyard forever."
AKHILESH YADAV, SP CHIEF AND EX-CM

Manesar stir: WhatsApp chats reveal 'conspiracy', say cops; 6 held

Abhimanyu Hazarika
Gurgaon, April 13

DAYS AFTER violence broke out at a protest called by a group of factory workers in Manesar for better wages and working conditions, the police in Gurgaon on Monday arrested six men for allegedly inciting rioting, vandalism, and arson. The arrests coincided with a high-level administrative meeting where industrial units were directed to ensure wage transparency and strict adherence to labour laws to prevent "external elements" from misleading the workforce.

The violence on April 9 targeted three separate branches of a private company at Manesar's Sector 2, said officers.

Protesters allegedly caused damage to the firm's property and government vehicles, assaulted staff, and engaged in stone-pelting against police personnel with the "intent to murder", officers added.

Following an investigation by the Manesar Crime Branch, six "primary conspirators arrested on Monday were identified as Akash, a resident of Rohtak; Harish Chand, a resident of Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand; Pintu Kumar Yadav, a resident of Madhubani, Bihar; Raju Singh, a resident of Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand; Shyambir, a resident of Badaun, Uttar Pradesh, and Ajit Singh, a resident of Jind, Haryana.

Digital evidence, specifically WhatsApp chats, revealed a conspiracy to use petrol bombs to set the industrial units on fire, said police. "The investigation further revealed that most of the arrested individuals are not labourers and have no professional association with the companies in Gurugram. They are accused of infiltrating the strike to incite workers toward violence", an officer said.

In response to the unrest, DCP Manesar Prabhsa (IPS), SDM Manesar Darshan Yadav, and Labour Commissioner Naveen Kaushik held a meeting on Monday with company owners, representatives, and contractors of the area. The meeting focused on resolving labour grievances and maintaining law and order.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Large-scale industrial protests across Noida, Manesar, Surat, Barauni demanding better wages and working conditions.
- Immediate trigger: Haryana's minimum wage revision (April 2026) leading to inter-state wage disparity.
- Discontent over implementation of new Labour Codes (Nov 2025).
- Rising cost of living due to LPG price surge (linked to West Asia crisis).
- Protests turned violent in some industrial clusters, affecting production.

Key Points

- Major DemandsIncrease in minimum wages (up to 35%)
- Equal pay for same work across states
- Social security (EPFO, ESIC coverage)
- Safe and hygienic working conditions
- Core IssuesContract labour exploitation
- Wage disparity between states
- Weak enforcement of Labour Codes
- Lack of grievance redressal
- Economic DimensionsInflation → erosion of real wages
- Fuel (LPG) price rise → increased household burden
- Labour unrest → disruption in industrial output

Static Linkages

- DPSP: Article 43 (Living wage, decent standard of life)
- Fundamental Right: Article 19(1)(c) (association/union)
- Code on Wages, 2019 (subsume Minimum Wages Act, 1948)
- Industrial Relations Code, 2020
- Real vs Nominal Wages (inflation impact)
- Informal workforce (~90%)
- EPFO & ESIC – social security mechanisms

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Wage revisions reflect responsiveness to inflation
- Labour Codes aim to rationalise labour laws
- Increased worker awareness (digital/social media driven)

Negatives

- Inter-state wage disparity → industrial unrest
- Weak implementation of Labour Codes
- Contract workers lack adequate protection
- Violent protests harm investment climate

Challenges

- High informalisation of workforce
- Absence of uniform national wage system
- Weak inspection & compliance mechanisms
- Rising inflation reducing purchasing power

Way Forward

- Operationalise National Floor Wage effectively
- Strengthen enforcement via digital labour compliance systems
- Promote tripartite dialogue (state–industry–labour)
- Universalise social security (include gig/contract workers)
- Index wages to CPI (inflation-linked revision)
- Improve occupational safety standards and inspections

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Rupee is more than a measure of price. It's also a barometer of credibility

SACHCHIDANAND SHUKLA

FOR SOME, a certain brand of mercantilist logic has whispered that the currency has to be the only "shock absorber" during an external crisis. And for a few others, a weaker currency is a shortcut to prosperity and competitiveness — a neat trick to boost exports and undercut global rivals. But as history and economic theory repeatedly demonstrate, when depreciation shifts from a tactical adjustment to a continuing bout, the much-hoped for pressure valve gives way or the hoped-for "competitive edge" quickly dulls, leaving behind a trail of inflationary wreckage and hollowed-out balance sheets.

The allure of a depreciating exchange rate lies in its simplicity: It makes ones' goods cheaper for foreigners. However, this is often a Faustian bargain. For many emerging and developed markets alike, the reality of a currency in freefall is not a boom in exports, but often a harsh blow to purchasing power and investor confidence. Imagine yourself in the shoes of a big global financial investor. How confident will you be in investing a billion dollars if you lose 9-10 per cent in a year due to depreciation?

To understand why currencies often fall farther and faster than fundamentals suggest, Econ 101 refers us to Rudi Dornbusch's overshooting model. Dornbusch observed that because goods prices are "sticky", they change slowly, and as financial markets are "fluid", exchange rates must do the heavy lifting in the short term to reach equilibrium.

When a central bank pivots to an expansionary stance, the currency doesn't just settle at its new long-run value; it "overshoots" it, collapsing violently before slowly appreciating back. For a country already facing a crisis of confidence, this overshooting can trigger a self-fulfilling prophecy of capital flight.

This struggle is encapsulated by the Mundell-Fleming Model, which presents the "Impossible Trinity". A country cannot simultaneously have a fixed exchange rate, free capital movement, and an independent monetary policy. When authorities try to fight market forces during a depreciation boost such as the current one, they often find themselves cornered. If they raise rates to defend the currency, they choke domestic growth; if they let it slide, they import inflation.

India's economy and the rupee have faced brutal currency storms before, like the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2008-09 and the 2013 Taper Tantrum, and bounced back smarter. Following the GFC, the world saw a race to the bottom as nations sought to devalue their way to recovery. However, those with high external debt found that a weaker currency meant their dollar-denominated liabilities swelled in local terms, fuelling corporate insolvencies rather than export miracles. The RBI then slashed its repo rate from 9 per cent to a low 4.75 per cent and cut reserve requirements (cash reserve ratio/statutory liquidity ratio), freeing up Rs 2.25 lakh crore, and rolled out special dollar windows for oil importers and non-banks.

The government also unleashed fiscal firepower: A stimulus package worth 3 per cent of GDP, including excise duty cuts from 14 per cent to 4 per cent (boosting consumer spending) and income tax relief (Rs 67,000 crore). The fiscal deficit ballooned to 6.5 per cent of GDP.

Fast forward to the 2013 Taper Tantrum, when the Federal Reserve merely hinted at slowing its bond-buying programme and emerging markets saw their currencies decimated. Countries like Turkey and Brazil learned that a depreciating currency acts as an immediate tax on the citizenry. As the cost of imported energy and food spiked, the resulting "cost-push" inflation eroded any gains made by exporters, proving that one cannot devalue one's way to long-term wealth if the industrial base relies on imported inputs.

The rupee crashed by around 20 per cent. The RBI hiked short-term rates by 200 basis points, allowed banks to raise foreign currency funds through Foreign Currency Non-Resident (FCNR-B) deposits and swap them at a concessional rate, and offered oil-dollar swaps to ease import bills. The government chipped in with a gold import duty hike from 6-10 per cent to 26 per cent, cut non-plan expenditure by 10 per cent, pruned subsidies (fertiliser decontrol hints), advanced diesel deregulation and recommitted to the FRBM target of 3 per cent overtime. The result: The rupee stabilised, the current account deficit shrank from 4.8 per cent of GDP to 1.3 per cent as oil prices fell and gold curbs bit. Growth dipped to 5 per cent, but it laid the groundwork for inflation targeting.

> For many emerging and developed markets alike, the reality of a currency in freefall is not a boom in exports, but often a harsh blow to purchasing power and investor confidence

Cut to 2026. India has reported a BoP deficit for two years in a row and FY26 may well make it the third year in a row. Notably, FPIs inflows were in the positive for only one of the last five years. Moreover, net FDI inflows since Aug-25 have been negative. Thus, even a smaller level of absolute CAD has become a funding challenge, creating headwinds for the rupee.

Monetary measures (for example, the spate of recent administrative RBI measures, a separate swap window for oil companies, sterilised interventions, tiered reserve requirements etc.) can help but may not suffice, and blunt use of interest rates during a supply shock may only impair growth.

Fiscal measures (oil price rejig, subsidy reforms) and broader policy reforms (energy security, distribution reforms, inclusion of energy sector, specifically electricity and petroleum products under GST) will be needed. With rising repatriation pressurising net FDI, retaining existing investors, not just attracting new ones, through measures such as ease of doing business norms, policy stability, attractive incentives and building long-term investor confidence will be needed to shore up confidence in the currency, as also seen in the past episodes.

The lesson for policymakers is clear. The rupee is more than a price; at times like these, it is also a barometer of credibility. While a modest depreciation can be a useful vent for economic pressure, a chronic fall is a fever that can eventually consume the patient. Stability, not destabilisation, is the true engine of growth.

Importantly, even if the US-Iran conflict were to end tomorrow, issues such as tariffs, Section 301 investigations, AI-related fears, geopolitics and BoP weakness could take centre stage and weigh on the currency. Policymakers, therefore, will need to mount a sustained and coordinated effort to boost confidence in the long-term story. We need all policy hands on the deck.

The writer is group chief economist, L&T. Views are personal

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Indian rupee is under sustained depreciation pressure due to external sector imbalances.
- India may record a third consecutive year of Balance of Payments (BoP) deficit in FY26, indicating persistent external vulnerability.
- Capital inflows weakening:
  - FPI inflows inconsistent
  - Net FDI inflows turned negative since August 2025
- Global headwinds: geopolitical tensions, tightening financial conditions, and trade disruptions affecting currency stability.
- Historical precedents:
  - 2008 Global Financial Crisis
  - 2013 Taper Tantrum
  - showed similar currency volatility and policy responses.

Key Points

- Depreciation impact:
  - Short-term: export competitiveness improves
  - Long-term: inflation, reduced purchasing power, capital outflows
- Dornbusch Overshooting Model:
  - Exchange rates adjust rapidly due to financial market dynamics
  - Leads to short-term "overshooting" beyond equilibrium
- Mundell-Fleming Model:
  - Impossible Trinity: cannot achieve all three simultaneously—fixed exchange rate, free capital mobility, independent monetary policy
- Structural concerns:
  - High import dependence (especially energy)
  - Weak export diversification
  - Investor confidence issues
- Policy tools used:
  - Monetary: repo rate, liquidity adjustment, forex intervention
  - Fiscal: subsidy rationalisation, fiscal consolidation

Static Linkages

- Balance of Payments: current account vs capital account
- Exchange rate determination (demand-supply of forex)
- Inflation: cost-push inflation via imports
- Monetary policy instruments: repo rate, CRR, SLR
- Fiscal deficit and macroeconomic stability
- Capital flows: differences between FDI and FPI
- External vulnerability indicators: CAD, forex reserves

Critical Analysis

Advantages of Depreciation

- Enhances export competitiveness
- Acts as automatic stabilizer during external shocks

Disadvantages

- Leads to imported inflation (fuel, fertilizers)
- Increases external debt burden
- Causes capital flight and investor uncertainty
- Reduces real income and purchasing power

Key Challenges

- Balancing inflation control with growth
- Managing volatile capital flows
- Structural import dependence
- Limited policy flexibility due to Impossible Trinity

Way Forward

- Maintain macroeconomic stability (inflation targeting, fiscal discipline)
- Boost manufacturing and exports (PLI schemes, diversification)
- Improve ease of doing business to retain and attract FDI
- Strengthen energy security to reduce import dependence
- Build adequate forex reserves buffers
- Ensure coordinated monetary and fiscal policy response
- Focus on long-term capital inflows rather than volatile flows

CIVILS WITH AKASH

We have voted for generations. How can I be a 'doubtful' voter?

KHALEDA KHATUN

MY JOB — like that of most medical professionals — is demanding and leaves little spare time. I cannot give time and attention to my personal and family life. I am always occupied with tending to patients, and putting a smile on their faces is now my greatest commitment. Having devoted myself to serving the country through such a career, I was shocked to learn that my name was under adjudication in the voters' list — that is, I was a "doubtful" voter. I was somewhat confident and hopeful that this mistake would be corrected after the submission of all my educational qualifications, pre-Independence land deeds of the present homestead, etc. Instead, I was declared an invalid and illegal voter even after submitting all these papers, including my grandparents' and great-grandfather's names, which appear in the 1952 electoral rolls, with no mistakes anywhere. I cannot accept this. I am filled with resentment and worried about how it will affect me professionally. It is really difficult to understand what the judicial officers — whose work I otherwise admire — are doing.

Haji Kalimuddin, the father of my great-grandfather, Hazi Riyajuddin, was born in 1845 in a village called Debipur. My family sacrificed a lot for India's independence. Yet today, we hear ourselves labelled Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and so forth. As distressing as the exclusion of our names may be, what is infinitely more agonising is this labelling. The painful stigma of being called an "illegal voter" — resulting from the deletion of names from the voters' list — was not imposed solely on me. While the names of three members of my immediate family — my parents and one brother — are still on the voters' list, the names of five others — including a brother who is a doctor, another who is a pharmacist, and a differently-abled sister — have been erased. There is no way to comprehend how the names of my parents and one brother remain on the voters' list while the rest of us have been deleted, despite the submission of all ECI-listed valid documents.

A police SI from my village has served in the West Bengal Police for 37 years. He has been excluded. Another individual — a member of the BSF who comes from my village — is posted in Odisha. Although the names of his grandfather and great-grandfather appear in the 1952 voters' list, his name has been deleted. Even those who serve to protect the nation have not been spared.

The SIR is a noble undertaking; yet, by being executed in an unplanned and unscientific manner, it has been reduced to a farcical and distressing process. The SIR in Bengal is snatching voters' rights away. They are being instructed to file appeals before a tribunal. Why should an innocent voter be compelled to run around seeking recourse? Why must they be subjected to such punishment when they have committed no offence? Does a democracy offer no remedy for such injustices?

The writer is a gynaecologist posted at Murshidabad Medical College and Hospital, Berhampore

There is simply no way to comprehend how the names of my parents and one brother remain in the voter list, while the rest of us have been deleted, despite the submission of all ECI-listed valid documents

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Reports have emerged from West Bengal regarding large-scale exclusion of voters during a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.
- Several individuals, despite submitting valid documents (including legacy data from 1952 electoral rolls), have been declared "doubtful voters" (D-voters).
- The Election Commission of India has initiated such revisions to ensure electoral integrity, but implementation issues have triggered widespread grievances.
- The Supreme Court of India has recently emphasized that the right to vote and be included in electoral rolls is both constitutional and integral to democracy.

Key Points

- D-voter Concept: Individuals whose citizenship is under doubt; must prove eligibility before tribunals.
- Mass Exclusions: Lakhs reportedly excluded due to "logical discrepancies" or documentation gaps.
- Inconsistency: Cases where members of the same family are treated differently despite similar documents.
- Burden of Proof: Citizens required to approach tribunals and provide legacy documents.
- Impact on Professionals: Even government servants (police, armed forces personnel) have faced exclusion.
- Human Rights Concerns: Social stigma of being labelled "illegal" or "foreigner".
- Administrative Issues: Allegations of unscientific and hurried implementation of SIR.

Static Linkages

- Article 326: Universal Adult Suffrage
- Representation of the People Act, 1950 & 1951
- Citizenship Act, 1955
- Principles of Natural Justice (Audi Alteram Partem)
- Rule of Law (Equality before Law – Article 14)
- Electoral Roll Revision Process (ECI guidelines)
- Quasi-judicial tribunals (Foreigners Tribunals concept in Assam context)

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Ensures clean and accurate electoral rolls
- Prevents illegal voting and electoral fraud
- Strengthens democratic legitimacy

Concerns

- Violation of natural justice if due process not followed
- Administrative arbitrariness in document verification
- Burden on citizens instead of the State
- Social stigma and psychological distress
- Exclusion of genuine citizens → democratic disenfranchisement

Stakeholder Perspectives

- Citizens: Fear, harassment, identity crisis
- Government/ECI: Need for electoral integrity
- Judiciary: Balancing legality with fundamental rights
- Civil Society: Concerns over exclusion and human rights

Constitutional/Moral Dimensions

- Right to vote linked to democratic participation
- Ethical issue of presumption of guilt vs innocence
- Equality vs administrative convenience

Way Forward

- Ensure transparent, standardized verification procedures
- Shift burden of proof partly to the State (use digital databases, Aadhaar linkage cautiously)
- Establish time-bound grievance redressal mechanisms
- Use technology (AI/data matching) to reduce human error
- Provide legal aid and awareness to affected citizens
- Judicial oversight to ensure due process and fairness
- Periodic audits of SIR process by independent bodies

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Punjab's sacrilege Bill will have chilling effect

BAISAKHI DAY this year saw the Punjab Assembly table a bill that bears the troubling hallmarks of a regressive and draconian law. The Jagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Bill, 2026, passed unanimously in a special session, proposes life imprisonment or, at the very least, a minimum jail term of seven years along with a fine of up to Rs 25 lakh for any person found guilty of desecrating the Guru Granth Sahib. The Bill expands the definition of sacrilege in sweeping and disturbing ways. It moves beyond acts of physical damage such as burning, tearing or theft to encompass spoken, written, symbolic and even electronic expressions that may be construed as hurting religious sentiments. In doing so, it could grant a licence to those who would invoke the fig leaf of "hurt sentiments" to target and silence others. Coming in the run-up to the assembly elections next year, the AAP government appears not merely intent on courting a section of the electorate but also on asserting authority over the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, which has historically controlled gurdwara affairs, by mandating stricter oversight over the publication of the Sikh holy book.

The Bill, the third of its kind, is the most stringent. The first, tabled in 2016 by the Akali-BJP government, was rejected by the Centre for discriminating against other religions, while the second, brought in during the Congress government in 2018, did not receive the Governor's assent. Its introduction comes more than a decade after a series of sacrilege incidents rocked the state in 2015. On June 1 that year, the Guru Granth Sahib was stolen from a gurdwara in Burj Jawahar Singh Wala village in Faridkot. Four months later, its torn pages were found in neighbouring Bargari village, along with anonymous posters claiming the act was retribution for alleged disrespect to the head of the Sirsa-based Dera Sacha Sauda. The protests that followed were seen to be the final nail in the coffin of the then Akali government. The case drags on, becoming an issue in elections.

It is unfortunate that the AAP government has chosen to rekindle these embers, even as Punjab grapples with urgent challenges: The menace of gangsters and extortion, the scourge of drugs, a faltering economy, and depleted state coffers. The Bill has triggered disquiet in a state that has long prided itself on its secular ethos, despite the intricate interplay of religion and politics in its public life. There can be no greater irony than that this legislation was tabled on Baisakhi, when Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa by uniting five men from diverse backgrounds across India, transcending the barriers of caste and creed to create a fellowship.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Punjab Assembly passed the Jagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Bill, 2026 unanimously during a special session on Baisakhi.
- The Bill proposes life imprisonment or a minimum of 7 years' imprisonment along with a fine up to ₹25 lakh for desecration of Guru Granth Sahib.
- It expands the definition of sacrilege to include spoken, written, symbolic, and electronic expressions.
- Comes in the backdrop of 2015 sacrilege incidents in Faridkot (Burj Jawahar Singh Wala & Bargari).
- Earlier attempts (2016, 2018) failed due to constitutional concerns and lack of assent.
- Raises concerns about political motivations involving the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and the ruling Aam Aadmi Party government.
- Tabled on Baisakhi, marking the founding of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh.

Key Points

- Stringent Punishment: Life imprisonment or minimum 7 years.
- Expanded Scope: Includes non-physical acts (speech, digital content).
- Legal Concerns: Broad definition may criminalize dissent or free expression.
- Political Context: Linked with electoral considerations and religious mobilization.
- Historical Sensitivity: Rooted in unresolved sacrilege cases (2015).
- Federal Issue: Past central rejection due to discriminatory nature (only one religion protected).
- Social Impact: Potential to disturb Punjab's secular fabric.

Static Linkages

- Article 19(1)(a): Freedom of speech and expression.
- Article 19(2): Reasonable restrictions (public order, morality, etc.).
- Article 25: Freedom of religion.
- Doctrine of reasonable classification (Article 14).
- IPC Sections 295–298: Offences relating to religion.
- Secularism as part of Basic Structure (Kesavananda Bharati case).
- Role of religious institutions in India's polity (historical evolution).
- Law & Order as a State subject (Seventh Schedule).

Critical Analysis

Pros

- Addresses public outrage over sacrilege incidents.
- Acts as a deterrent against religious desecration.
- Reinforces respect for religious sentiments.
- May help maintain law and order in sensitive contexts.

Cons

- Overbroad definition risks misuse against dissent.
- Potential violation of Article 19(1)(a) (free speech).
- Selective protection may violate Article 14 (equality).
- Encourages majoritarian or identity-based politics.
- May lead to vigilantism or false accusations.
- Overlaps with existing IPC provisions → legal redundancy.

Stakeholder Perspectives

- Government: Law & order, political consolidation.
- Religious Bodies: Protection of sanctity.
- Civil Society: Concern over civil liberties.
- Judiciary: Likely to test constitutional validity.

Way Forward

- Ensure religion-neutral legislation covering all faiths.
- Define sacrilege precisely to avoid ambiguity.
- Strengthen existing IPC provisions instead of duplication.
- Safeguards against misuse (e.g., prior sanction for FIR).
- Promote interfaith dialogue and social harmony.
- Focus governance on core issues: drugs, economy, law & order.
- Judicial review to ensure constitutional compliance.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

On nuclear energy, an Indian milestone

THE ATTAINMENT of criticality by the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor in Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu, is a long-awaited milestone that marks a generational shift in India's use of nuclear energy. It represents the beginning of the realisation of the vision of the founding fathers of India's atomic energy programme over seven decades ago. The fast breeder reactors are incredibly more challenging to design, build and operate, compared to the Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors that are the mainstay of India's nuclear sector. But more than the technological accomplishment, the commencement of the second stage of India's three-stage nuclear programme signifies an important step forward in securing the country's energy independence and strategic autonomy in the coming decades.

For long viewed with suspicion and considered a safety risk, nuclear energy is now seen as a critical source of clean and abundant energy, essential to satisfy the growing energy requirements in a world that is compelled to reduce, and progressively eliminate, its dependence on fossil fuels. For India, it is even more critical, because it has the potential to free up, or at least significantly reduce, dependence on energy imports that make the country vulnerable to external shocks. India's nuclear sector is also dependent on other countries, because the main fuel, uranium, is not adequately available in the country. It is to the credit of Homi Bhabha and his generation of Indian nuclear scientists that they articulated the three-stage pathway — the third stage is about using thorium as the main fuel, found in abundance in India.

Travelling on the three-stage pathway was never going to be easy. The first test fast breeder reactor could only be built in the early 2000s. Several times during this journey, it appeared that India had lost focus. The attainment of criticality at Kalpakkam, hopefully, will put the transition on the fast track once again. The news from Kalpakkam suggests that India is finally making serious efforts for rapid expansion of its nuclear sector. The setting up of a nuclear energy mission, the enactment of the SHANTI Act, the push for development of SMRs, opening up of the nuclear sector for private participation, are all vital steps in this direction.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- India's Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam has achieved criticality (self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction).
- It marks the operationalisation of Stage-II of India's three-stage nuclear programme envisioned by Homi J. Bhabha.
- The PFBR is developed by BHAVINI under the Department of Atomic Energy.
- Comes amid India's push for clean energy transition and energy security.
- Complemented by policy measures like nuclear energy mission, SMR development, and private participation.

Key Points

- Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR):Uses fast neutrons (no moderator).
- Converts fertile material (U-238/Th-232) into fissile fuel (Pu-239/U-233).
- Produces more fuel than it consumes → "breeder".

a. India's Three-Stage Nuclear Programme:Stage I: Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) using natural uranium.

b. Stage II: Fast Breeder Reactors using plutonium.

c. Stage III: Thorium-based reactors (U-233 fuel cycle).

- Significance of PFBR:Reduces dependence on imported uranium.
- Unlocks thorium potential (India has ~25% of global thorium reserves).
- Enhances energy independence & strategic autonomy.
- Supports India's net-zero commitments (2070).
- Technological Aspects:Uses liquid sodium as coolant (high efficiency, low pressure).
- High safety and engineering complexity.
- Policy Push:SHANTI Act (proposed reforms in nuclear sector governance).
- Promotion of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs).
- Opening nuclear sector to private sector participation.

Static Linkages

- Nuclear fission: splitting of heavy nuclei releasing energy and neutrons.
- Chain reaction: controlled vs uncontrolled reactions.
- Fertile vs fissile materials: U-238, Th-232 vs U-235, Pu-239.
- India's limited uranium but abundant thorium reserves.
- Basics of neutron moderation and reactor types.
- Role of atomic energy in reducing carbon emissions.

Critical Analysis

Advantages:

- Ensures long-term energy security.
- Supports low-carbon energy transition.
- Reduces vulnerability to global fuel supply shocks.
- Strengthens strategic autonomy in nuclear technology.

Challenges:

- High capital cost and long gestation period.
- Safety concerns (sodium coolant risks, radiation hazards).
- Limited public acceptance due to past nuclear fears.
- Complex technology requiring skilled workforce.
- Regulatory and liability issues (civil nuclear liability law).

Stakeholder Perspectives:

- Government: Energy security + climate goals.
- Scientists: Technological breakthrough.
- Environmentalists: Mixed—clean but risky.
- Local communities: Safety and displacement concerns.

Way Forward

- Accelerate thorium-based reactor R&D.
- Strengthen independent nuclear regulatory framework.
- Expand public-private partnerships cautiously.
- Improve safety protocols & transparency.
- Integrate nuclear with renewables for energy mix stability.
- Invest in human resource development in nuclear sciences.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Trump is blockading the system that America built

ANIL RAMAN

AS TALKS in Islamabad failed, President Donald Trump announced that the US Navy would immediately start blockading the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most important waterways. The order is broad: American naval forces must stop and inspect any ship entering or leaving the strait. Ships that have paid transit fees to Iran will be intercepted in international waters. Iranian mines in the strait are to be destroyed. If any Iranian force fires on American ships or commercial vessels, the response will be overwhelming force. Trump also said that at some point, the US military would "finish up the little that is left of Iran". There was no consultation with allies, no legal framework, and no operational plan. There was no sign that anyone in his administration had considered what would happen next. It was just a social media post threatening to blow Iranians "to hell".

A fifth of the world's oil passed through the Strait of Hormuz every day before the war began. But Trump understands something that makes this more than just reckless: The pain of a blockade would mostly hurt other countries. This was never India's war, or Japan's, South Korea's, or Germany's. These countries did not choose this confrontation. Most tried to stay out of it, keeping diplomatic channels open with Tehran while managing their own complicated ties with Washington. They have no say in American foreign policy and no seat at the table.

Yet, the consequences of the announcement fall directly on them. The US, now the world's largest oil producer, is mostly protected from Gulf energy disruptions. Last week, Trump posted that empty tankers were already heading to the US to be filled with American oil. In other words, the blockade is also a market strategy: Cut off Gulf supply, shift demand to American producers, and call it national security. That is thuggery with flair.

Iran has spent decades preparing for this. Sea mines, anti-ship missiles, fast boat swarms, and proxy networks stretch across the region. These are tools built specifically to make American naval operations costly and complicated in a confined space like the Strait of Hormuz. What stands out is that there is no plan beyond immediate American gain. A blockade like this needs partners to help share the legal and military responsibilities. There should be a clear idea of how Iran might respond and how to handle it. There also needs to be a sense of what success looks like and how to achieve it. The announcement had none of this.

This pattern is now familiar. Tariff announcements sent global markets into chaos while American negotiators waited for other countries to give in. Ceasefire talks left allies confused and adversaries planning their next move. The habit of making big public demands continued, with no plan for what comes next. What seems like bold pressure is, on a closer look, a consistent pattern: Create a crisis, make sure others pay the price, and take whatever advantage can be found in the confusion.

For India, this is a direct problem. India imports a lot from the Gulf, and millions of Indian workers in the region send money home. New Delhi has spent years building ties with both Washington and Tehran. Being forced to pick sides every time America confronts Iran is simply too costly. When America creates crises that help it but hurt others, it puts that pressure on India, too. The bigger harm is to the international order. The US built much of its post-war reputation on keeping global trade routes and sea lanes open for everyone. A president who closes one of the world's busiest waterways, while making sure American oil exporters benefit from the chaos, is abandoning that role and taking advantage of the system he inherited.

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> Trump understands something that makes this more than just reckless: The pain of a blockade would mostly hurt other countries. This was never India's war, or Japan's, South Korea's, or Germany's

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Strait of Hormuz has emerged as a flashpoint after the US (under Donald Trump) reportedly proposed naval blockading measures against Iran.
- The proposal includes inspection of ships, interception of vessels linked to Iran, and use of force if provoked.
- The Strait handles ~20% of global oil trade (as per EIA estimates), making it one of the most critical energy chokepoints.
- The move comes amid escalating tensions in West Asia, with implications for global trade, energy security, and geopolitics.
- Major economies like India, Japan, and Germany are indirectly affected due to dependence on Gulf oil.

Key Points

- Strategic ImportanceConnects Persian Gulf oil producers (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran) to global markets.
- Narrow width (~33 km at narrowest point) makes it highly vulnerable to disruptions.
- US Strategic IntentNaval dominance and pressure on Iran.
- Potential economic strategy: shift global demand toward US oil exports.
- Minimal dependence on Gulf oil due to shale revolution.
- Iran's CapabilitiesAnti-access/area denial (A2/AD): sea mines, anti-ship missiles, fast attack crafts.
- Proxy networks across West Asia.
- Global ImpactOil price volatility and supply shocks.
- Disruption of maritime trade routes.
- Insurance and freight costs surge.
- India-Specific ConcernsImports ~60% of crude oil from West Asia (Economic Survey).
- ~9 million Indian diaspora in Gulf (MEA data).
- Strategic balancing between US and Iran diplomacy.

Static Linkages

- India's energy security depends heavily on imports (~85% crude import dependence).
- Freedom of navigation is a principle under United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- Chokepoints in world geography: Hormuz, Malacca, Bab-el-Mandeb (NCERT Geography).
- Concept of "Global Commons" and sea lanes of communication (SLOCs).
- India's strategic initiatives: SAGAR doctrine (Security and Growth for All in the Region).
- Role of Indian Navy in securing maritime trade routes.

Critical Analysis

Pros (from US perspective)

- Strengthens strategic deterrence against Iran.
- Enhances US energy export opportunities.
- Demonstrates naval supremacy.

Cons

- Violates international norms of free navigation (UNCLOS concerns).
- Risks military escalation in a sensitive region.
- Economic coercion affecting neutral countries.

For India

- NegativeRising oil prices → inflation, fiscal pressure.
- Threat to diaspora safety.
- Strategic dilemma between US and Iran.
- Limited OpportunitiesDiversification of energy imports (Russia, renewables).
- Strengthening strategic autonomy.

Global Concerns

- Undermines rules-based international order.
- Sets precedent for unilateral control of global commons.
- Increases instability in already volatile West Asia.

Way Forward

- Promote multilateral dialogue involving US, Iran, EU, and regional players.
- Strengthen international legal frameworks under UNCLOS.
- India to:
  - Diversify crude sources (Russia, Africa, renewables).
  - Expand strategic petroleum reserves.
  - Enhance naval capabilities in Indian Ocean Region.
- Push for de-escalation diplomacy via forums like UN.
- Develop resilient global supply chains to reduce chokepoint dependency.

CIVILS WITH AKASH