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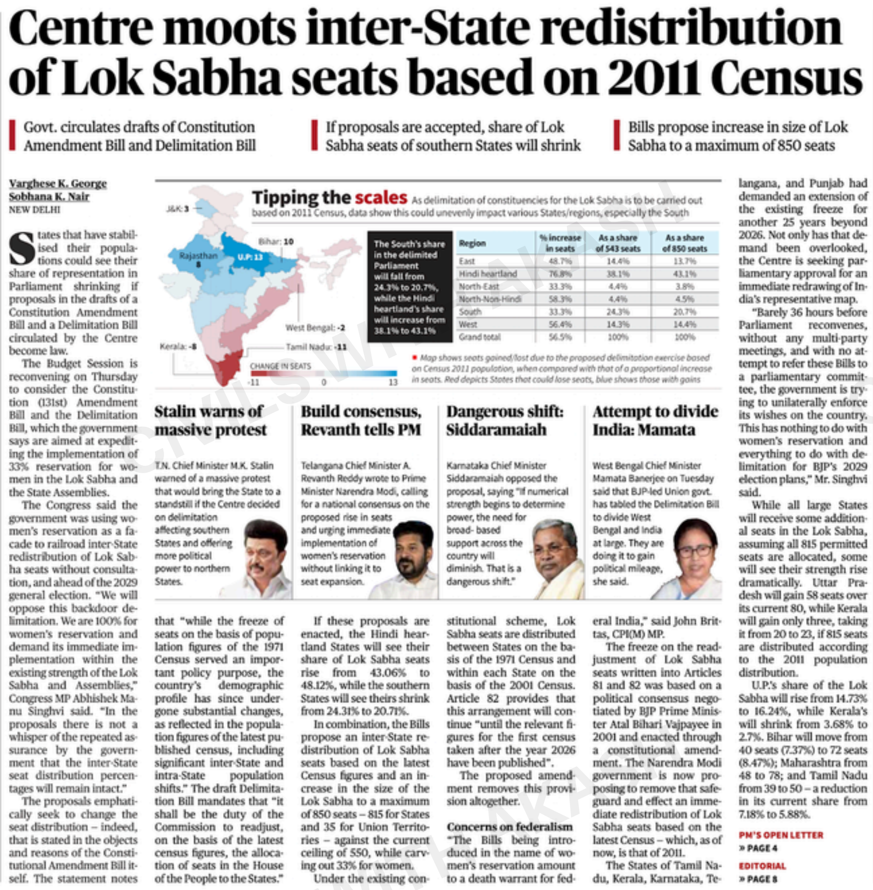

Centre moots inter-State redistribution of Lok Sabha seats based on 2011 Census

Govt. circulates drafts of Constitution Amendment Bill and Delimitation Bill

If proposals are accepted, share of Lok Sabha seats of southern States will shrink

Bills propose increase in size of Lok Sabha to a maximum of 850 seats

Varghese K. George
Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

States that have stabilised their populations could see their share of representation in Parliament shrinking if proposals in the drafts of a Constitution Amendment Bill and a Delimitation Bill circulated by the Centre become law.

The Budget Session is reconvening on Thursday to consider the Constitution (131st) Amendment Bill and the Delimitation Bill, which the government says are aimed at expediting the implementation of 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies.

The Congress said the government was using women's reservation as a facade to railroad inter-State redistribution of Lok Sabha seats without consultation, and ahead of the 2029 general election. "We will oppose this backdoor delimitation. We are 100% for women's reservation and demand its immediate implementation within the existing strength of the Lok Sabha and Assemblies," Congress MP Abhishek Manu Singhvi said. "In the proposals there is not a whisper of the repeated assurance by the government that the inter-State seat distribution percentages will remain intact."

The proposals emphatically seek to change the seat distribution – indeed, that is stated in the objects and reasons of the Constitutional Amendment Bill itself. The statement notes that "while the freeze of seats on the basis of population figures of the 1971 Census served an important policy purpose, the country's demographic profile has since undergone substantial changes, as reflected in the population figures of the latest published census, including significant inter-State and intra-State population shifts." The draft Delimitation Bill mandates that "it shall be the duty of the Commission to readjust, on the basis of the latest census figures, the allocation of seats in the House of the People to the States."

If these proposals are enacted, the Hindi heartland States will see their share of Lok Sabha seats rise from 43.06% to 48.12%, while the southern States will see theirs shrink from 24.31% to 20.71%.

In combination, the Bills propose an inter-State redistribution of Lok Sabha seats based on the latest Census figures and an increase in the size of the Lok Sabha to a maximum of 850 seats – 815 for States and 35 for Union Territories – against the current ceiling of 550, while carving out 33% for women.

Under the existing constitutional scheme, Lok Sabha seats are distributed between States on the basis of the 1971 Census and within each State on the basis of the 2001 Census. Article 82 provides that this arrangement will continue "until the relevant figures for the first census taken after the year 2026 have been published".

The proposed amendment removes this provision altogether.

Concerns on federalism

"The Bills being introduced in the name of women's reservation amount to a death warrant for federal India," said John Brittas, CPI(M) MP.

The freeze on the readjustment of Lok Sabha seats written into Articles 81 and 82 was based on a political consensus negotiated by BJP Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2001 and enacted through a constitutional amendment. The Narendra Modi government is now proposing to remove that safeguard and effect an immediate redistribution of Lok Sabha seats based on the latest Census – which, as of now, is that of 2011.

The States of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana, and Punjab had demanded an extension of the existing freeze for another 25 years beyond 2026. Not only has that demand been overlooked, the Centre is seeking parliamentary approval for an immediate redrawing of India's representative map.

"Barely 36 hours before Parliament reconvenes, without any multi-party meetings, and with no attempt to refer these Bills to a parliamentary committee, the government is trying to unilaterally enforce its wishes on the country. This has nothing to do with women's reservation and everything to do with delimitation for BJP's 2029 election plans," Mr. Singhvi said.

While all large States will receive some additional seats in the Lok Sabha, assuming all 815 permitted seats are allocated, some will see their strength rise dramatically. Uttar Pradesh will gain 58 seats over its current 80, while Kerala will gain only three, taking it from 20 to 23, if 815 seats are distributed according to the 2011 population distribution.

U.P.'s share of the Lok Sabha will rise from 14.73% to 16.24%, while Kerala's will shrink from 3.68% to 2.7%. Bihar will move from 40 seats (7.37%) to 72 seats (8.47%); Maharashtra from 48 to 78; and Tamil Nadu from 39 to 50 – a reduction in its current share from 7.18% to 5.88%.

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Tipping the scales As delimitation of constituencies for the Lok Sabha is to be carried out based on 2011 Census, data show this could unevenly impact various States/regions, especially the South

The South's share in the delimited Parliament will fall from 24.3% to 20.7%, while the Hindi heartland's share will increase from 38.1% to 43.1%

Region	% increase in seats	As a share of 543 seats	As a share of 850 seats
East	48.7%	14.4%	13.7%
Hindi heartland	76.8%	38.1%	43.1%
North-East	33.3%	4.4%	3.8%
North-Non-Hindi	58.3%	4.4%	4.5%
South	33.3%	24.3%	20.7%
West	56.4%	14.3%	14.4%
Grand total	56.5%	100%	100%

• *Map shows seats gained/lost due to the proposed delimitation exercise based on Census 2011 population, when compared with that of a proportional increase in seats. Red depicts States that could lose seats, blue shows those with gains*

Stalin warns of massive protest

T.N. Chief Minister M.K. Stalin warned of a massive protest that would bring the State to a standstill if the Centre decided on delimitation affecting southern States and offering more political power to northern States.

Build consensus, Revanth tells PM

Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, calling for a national consensus on the proposed rise in seats and urging immediate implementation of women's reservation without linking it to seat expansion.

Dangerous shift: Siddaramaiah

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah opposed the proposal, saying "If numerical strength begins to determine power, the need for broad- based support across the country will diminish. That is a dangerous shift."

Attempt to divide India: Mamata

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday said that BJP-led Union govt. has tabled the Delimitation Bill to divide West Bengal and India at large. They are doing it to gain political mileage, she said.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Union Government has introduced the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill along with a Delimitation Bill.
- Objective: Facilitate implementation of 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
- Key proposal:
  - Immediate delimitation based on latest Census (2011).
  - Expansion of Lok Sabha strength up to 850 seats.
- Triggered concerns over federal imbalance, population-based redistribution, and timing before 2029 elections.

Key Points

- Existing Framework:
  - Seat allocation among States → based on 1971 Census.
  - Freeze on inter-State redistribution till post-2026 Census (Articles 81 & 82).
- Proposed Changes:
  - Removal of freeze on seat allocation.
  - Redistribution based on latest population figures.
  - Reservation of 33% seats for women.
- Likely Outcomes:
  - Hindi heartland States gain representation (UP, Bihar).
  - Southern States' share declines (Tamil Nadu, Kerala).
  - Larger States gain more seats → shift in political power balance.

Static Linkages

- Article 81 – Composition of Lok Sabha (population-based representation).
- Article 82 – Readjustment after every Census.
- Delimitation Commission:
  - Appointed by President.
  - Orders have force of law and are not subject to judicial review.
- 42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976):
  - Freeze on seat allocation till 2001 (population control incentive).
- 84th & 87th Amendments:
  - Extended freeze till 2026, allowed internal delimitation.
- Constitutional principle:
  - "One person, one vote, one value" vs Federal equilibrium.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Ensures fair representation based on current population.
- Corrects distortions from outdated 1971 Census base.
- Enables operationalisation of women's reservation.
- Larger Parliament may improve representative inclusivity.

Concerns

- Penalises States with effective population control policies.
- Threat to cooperative federalism and regional balance.
- Uses 2011 Census (outdated) → legitimacy concerns.
- Risk of political majoritarianism due to regional concentration of seats.
- Perceived lack of consultation and parliamentary scrutiny.

Way Forward

- Conduct updated Census before delimitation exercise.
- Build political consensus via Inter-State dialogue.
- Develop a balanced formula:
  - Population + governance indicators (fertility rate, HDI).
- Ensure women's reservation is not delayed due to delimitation issues.
- Consider gradual/phased redistribution to maintain federal balance.

Deportation policy seeks district-level task force

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The Union government has formulated a new deportation policy under which all States have been asked to set up a special task force in each district to "detect, identify and deport/send back illegal migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar", and provide a monthly status report on foreigners who are missing or overstaying their visas.

The States have been asked to operationalise "holding centres/camps" with a 10-foot-high boundary ringed with barbed wires, to restrict the movement of such undocumented migrants till they are deported or "sent back" to Bangladesh or Myanmar, says the policy framed by the Union Home Ministry.

An upper limit of 90 days has been fixed to verify the antecedents of suspected Bangladeshi or Myanmarese nationals, if they claim to be a resident of another State. Private buildings could also be hired to run as holding centres, if government land was not available, the Ministry said. The States have been asked to upload documents, including Aadhaar, driving licence, and PAN cards obtained by illegal migrants on a portal, so that they could be cancelled, and the person "blacklisted" in government records.

Many sent back

After the government change in Bangladesh in August 2024, the police across the country were asked by the Ministry to detect Bangladeshis who had illegally entered the country. The drive assumed momentum after the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22, 2025, and Operation Sindoor on May 7, 2025. In some cases, undocumented Bangladeshis were flown on Indian Air Force planes and sent to Bangladesh.

At least seven West Bengal residents who were pushed to Bangladesh by the Border Security Force (BSF) on suspicion of being Bangladeshis were brought back to India due to the intervention of the West Bengal government.

Last year, the Gujarat Police had conducted an overnight operation in Ahmedabad to identify undocumented migrants. FILE PHOTO

A major part of the policy that was shared with the States in February, a copy of which has been seen by *The Hindu*, reiterates and consolidates the existing guidelines with a separate chapter dedicated to "illegally staying Bangladeshis/Myanmar nationals in the country". The guidelines on "holding centres" will be applicable to other foreigners awaiting deportation, and those declared foreigners by Foreigners' Tribunals (FTs). FTs are unique to Assam.

Separate enclosures

The holding centre should have separate enclosures for men and women, and should be equipped with all amenities, including an LPG connection in the kitchen, fire safety system, strict access control measures and adequate security personnel, it said.

"There should be sufficient open space within the compound", the Ministry added, and it should be ensured that members of the same family were not separated, and all family members were housed in the same holding centre/camp.

"The persons housed should be permitted to meet/communicate with the family members and the Embassy/High Commission concerned," the MHA said.

States have been directed to immediately initiate nationality verification of arrested foreigners so that travel documents are ready upon the completion of judicial proceedings, enabling expeditious deportation. "After deportation, proposals for blacklisting of such foreign nationals to prevent their future entry into India may be sent to the Bureau of Immigration," the Ministry said.

In case of people who inadvertently cross the border, the designated force shall interrogate them, and "if found innocent, they may be handed over to the border guarding force of Bangladesh or Myanmar", or to the police, if found guilty, before capturing the biometrics, the Ministry said.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Ministry of Home Affairs has framed a comprehensive deportation policy targeting illegal migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- States directed to establish district-level task forces for detection, identification, and deportation.
- Mandatory monthly reporting on overstaying and missing foreigners.
- Policy gains significance in the backdrop of heightened security concerns, including the Pahalgam terror attack.
- Introduction of holding centres to detain undocumented migrants pending deportation.

Key Points

- Institutional Framework
  - District-level special task forces in all States.
  - Regular monitoring through monthly status reports.
- Holding Centres
  - Secured facilities with restricted movement (10-ft walls, barbed fencing).
  - Separate enclosures for men and women.
  - Families to be kept together.
  - Provision of basic amenities (LPG, fire safety, communication access).
- Verification Mechanism
  - 90-day limit for nationality verification.
  - Use of documents (Aadhaar, PAN, DL) for identification and cancellation.
  - Mandatory biometric capture and digital records.
- Deportation & Legal Process
  - Deportation after completion of judicial proceedings.
  - Blacklisting to prevent re-entry.
  - Access to Embassies/High Commissions ensured.
  - Applies also to those declared foreigners by Foreigners' Tribunals (FTs) (Assam).

Static Linkages

- Foreigners Act, 1946 → Empowers government to regulate entry, stay, and deportation of foreigners.
- Citizenship Act, 1955 → Defines citizenship acquisition and termination.
- Article 21 → Protection of life and personal liberty for all persons.
- Article 14 → Equality before law (applies to foreigners as well).
- Assam Accord, 1985 → Framework for detection and deportation of illegal migrants.
- Non-refoulement principle → International norm (not explicitly codified in India).

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Strengthens national security framework.
- Provides uniform and structured deportation mechanism.
- Checks misuse of identity documents and welfare benefits.
- Enhances data-driven governance (biometrics, digital records).

Challenges

- Risk of wrongful detention/deportation due to documentation gaps.
- Potential violation of due process and Article 21 safeguards.
- Humanitarian concerns in detention conditions.
- Diplomatic sensitivities with Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- Administrative and financial burden on States.

Way Forward

- Ensure transparent, evidence-based verification with inter-state coordination.
- Provide legal aid and judicial oversight for detainees.
- Upgrade border management systems (smart fencing, surveillance).
- Strengthen bilateral mechanisms for smooth deportation.
- Adopt humane detention standards in line with international norms.
- Use technology with safeguards to avoid exclusion errors.

A Kerala exporter's ordeal highlights depth of West Asian crisis

Dhinesh Kallungal
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

As tensions escalate over the U.S.'s blockade of maritime traffic to and from Iran's ports, along with Iran's counter-threat to shut down ports of its West Asian neighbours, the story of an exporter who shipped a container load of watermelon and muskmelon from Kerala to Jebel Ali in the UAE via a port in Maharashtra on the eve of the West Asian war highlights the depth of the crisis faced by the export-import community, both within and outside the country.

Shaiju K., export manager at City Fresh, Thiruvananthapuram, loaded a 40-foot reefer container with watermelon and muskmelon from Nhava Sheva port in Maharashtra to Jebel Ali on February 26. The shipping agent, Sri Sri Navigation Shipping, provided a timeline indicating departure by February 28 and expected arrival at Jebel Ali on March 2. He paid a shipping charge of ₹2.32 lakh to transport the consignment, which was valued at ₹8.5 lakh and comprised perishable cargo.

Left with no options

A day after the goods were loaded onto the vessel, the war began, and the exporter had no information about the consignment until March 10. Later, the agent informed him that the cargo would be offloaded at Sohar Port in Oman instead of Jebel Ali due to the escalating conflict. With no other option, the exporter consented. However, the agent subsequently informed him that the container would instead be transported to Jebel Ali on March 11.

However, nothing materialised, and the agent issued an additional bill of ₹14,000 towards shipping charges. In addition, the exporter was asked to pay a war-risk surcharge of $4,000 and a mandatory 5% surcharge amounting to $1,000. "I was not in a position to pay these charges, as the total value of the commodity was less than the war-risk surcharge and other shipping costs. So, I requested them to release the cargo without the extra bills, as there was no certainty regarding the quality of the perishable goods," said Mr. Shaiju.

Tainted goods: The consignment shipped from Kerala found to be damaged after a delay in reaching UAE. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

However, the request was denied, and he had to pay ₹6.89 lakh to clear the cargo. The ordeal did not end there as the goods were found to be completely rotten upon offloading. The exporter had to pay an additional ₹2 lakh to the local municipal authorities to dispose of the rotten melon. "In short, I had to bear a liability of around ₹22 lakh-₹23 lakh for reasons beyond my control," Mr. Shaiju added.

Air cargo

According to K. Suresh Kumar, chairman of the Air Cargo Agents Association of India (ACAAI), the lack of certainty in timely delivery of goods shipped by sea has led exporters to turn to air cargo, where freight charges have increased two to threefold.

Moreover, exporters often pay advances to various parties well before such crises. In such situations, they are left with the choice of either forfeiting the advance or taking the risk of proceeding with shipments to sustain their business.

Increase in price

However, air cargo offers relatively better prospects, as consignments reach their destinations with minimal delay, albeit at significantly higher costs.

The price of transporting 1 kg of cargo to Europe has risen from ₹170 to ₹340, while rates for various West Asian destinations have increased from ₹60 to around ₹150 per kg, according to K. Suresh Kumar, chairman of the ACAAI.

Kerala typically exports around 600 tonnes of perishable cargo daily destinations across the globe. This has now dropped to less than 400 tonnes a day, Mr. Kumar said.

Munshid Ali, secretary of the Kerala Exporters' Forum, said it was high time for the Union government to establish a statutory freight regulatory authority to curb illegal practices in the sector and protect the export-import community from the adverse effects of global geopolitical developments.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Rising tensions due to U.S. blockade of maritime routes linked to Iran and Iran's counter-threats have disrupted shipping in West Asia.
- India's export routes via Nhava Sheva Port to Jebel Ali Port have been affected.
- A Kerala exporter suffered heavy financial losses due to rerouting, delays, and war-risk surcharges on perishable cargo.
- Exporters are increasingly shifting to air cargo, despite significantly higher costs, due to uncertainty in maritime transport.

Key Points

- Geopolitical disruption of trade routes near Strait of Hormuz, a critical global oil and trade corridor.
- War-risk surcharge & additional freight costs imposed by shipping companies during conflict situations.
- Sharp increase in logistics cost:
  - Europe: ₹170/kg → ₹340/kg
  - West Asia: ₹60/kg → ₹150/kg
- Decline in exports: Kerala's perishable exports reduced from ~600 tonnes/day to <400 tonnes/day.
- Perishable goods most affected due to delays → spoilage and heavy financial losses.
- Regulatory vacuum: Absence of a statutory freight regulator leads to arbitrary pricing.
- Insurance gaps: Standard marine insurance often excludes war-risk without additional premium.

Static Linkages

- India conducts ~95% of its trade by volume and ~70% by value via maritime transport (Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways).
- Strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) in global trade and energy flows.
- Concepts:
  - Marine insurance & war-risk coverage
  - Force majeure in contracts
  - Supply chain disruptions
- Role of cold-chain logistics and reefer containers in agricultural exports.
- Freight rate volatility linked to geopolitical risks (Economic Survey).

Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Rising logistics cost reduces export competitiveness.
- MSMEs and small exporters face disproportionate risks.
- High dependence on vulnerable chokepoints like Hormuz.
- Arbitrary freight pricing due to lack of regulation.
- Inadequate insurance coverage for geopolitical risks.

Opportunities

- Push for diversification of logistics (air + multimodal).
- Development of alternative trade corridors.
- Strengthening India's role in regional supply chains.

Way Forward

- Establish a Statutory Freight Regulatory Authority for transparency.
- Expand marine insurance with war-risk coverage, especially for MSMEs.
- Promote air cargo initiatives (e.g., Krishi Udan Scheme).
- Develop alternative corridors (e.g., INSTC).
- Strengthen cold-chain and port infrastructure.
- Enhance export credit support (ECGC, EXIM Bank).
- Create early warning systems for geopolitical risks in trade.

The alarming rise of medicalisation in India

The recent announcement by Air India, hinting at possible pay cuts or even de-rostering for crew members with a higher Body Mass Index (BMI), may, at first glance, appear to be a prudent and well-intentioned step toward ensuring fitness and operational safety. Aviation, after all, is a profession where physical readiness is essential. Yet, the timing of this decision –coinciding with the week an anti-obesity drug, semaglutide, went off patent and nearly 40 products entered the Indian market– signals something deeper.

India today faces a mounting burden of obesity and associated metabolic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, fatty liver disease, and dyslipidaemia. Nearly a quarter of Indians are overweight or obese. One in 10 adults live with diabetes, one in three with hypertension, and a substantial proportion has fatty liver disease. Even more concerning is the rapid rise of obesity among children. The causes, which are neither obscure nor debated, include the proliferation of ultra-processed or high fat, salt and sugar-content foods, and increasingly sedentary lifestyles shaped by urban work patterns, shrinking open spaces, chronic stress, alcohol consumption, and inadequate sleep. Compounding this is a genetic predisposition among Indians and South Asians toward excess body fat despite a seemingly lean appearance – the so-called "thin-fat" phenotype.

Historically, in a society long shaped by undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, excess weight was once perceived as a marker of prosperity. Consequently, as overweight and obesity began rising over the past two decades, public discourse remained muted, almost reluctant to confront this emerging reality.

Then came the pharmaceutical response. Around this time last year, another anti-obesity drug, tirzepatide, entered the Indian market and rapidly became one of its highest-selling medications. Its commercial success revealed not just clinical demand but also the emergence of a vast and lucrative therapeutic marketplace. With semaglutide now available at a remarkably lower cost, the market potential has expanded further.

Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya

is a practising cardiometabolic physician, an internationally certified metabolic health coach, and a health policy expert

Sustained marketing campaign

Over the past year, however, a more troubling pattern has emerged. Prescription medicines cannot be directly advertised to the public, yet pharmaceutical companies have grown adept at navigating these constraints. Surrogate advertising – often framed as public awareness campaigns – has become increasingly sophisticated. In the past year, the country witnessed full page newspaper campaigns, and billboards at major urban areas regarding obesity; influencer endorsements for medical products; and sponsored features that resemble independent journalism, subtly shape public perception without explicitly naming the drugs.

Regulatory responses lagged behind. The restrain from the government on newspaper ads and billboards came only a year later.

The messaging on drugs from pharmaceuticals is rarely overt; instead, it is nuanced, persistent, and highly effective, gradually reshaping both public expectations and clinical practice. In such an environment, the boundary between genuine scientific advancement and commercial enthusiasm begins to blur. New drugs are presented as transformative breakthroughs, while their uncertainties receive far less attention.

The less talked about side effects

Anti-obesity medications, particularly those acting on GLP-1 pathways, are associated not only with fat loss but also with a reduction in lean muscle mass – a condition known as sarcopenia. As there is loss of fat from the body, nearly 25% to 40% is contributed by the loss of muscle mass – an unintended but serious consequence. By suppressing appetite and reducing caloric intake, these drugs can inadvertently lead to muscle loss unless accompanied by adequate protein intake and structured physical activity, especially resistance training. Sarcopenia in this context is no longer a theoretical concern. It has been documented in clinical trials and is supported by emerging real-world evidence. Yet, amid the celebration of weight loss outcomes, such risks are often understated. Individuals may achieve a lower BMI while compromising strength, metabolic resilience, and long-term health.

The trajectory does not end there. Sarcopenia itself is now emerging as a new therapeutic target. Pharmaceutical pipelines already include drugs aimed at preventing or reversing muscle loss, many in advanced stages of development. It requires little imagination to foresee the next phase – a population using anti-obesity medicines, along with additional therapies to manage the very consequences these drugs produce. What we are witnessing here is a cascading logic: one intervention begets another, each addressing the unintended consequences of the previous one. It is a self-reinforcing cycle sustained by scientific innovation, commercial incentives, and a growing societal preference for quick pharmacological solutions over sustained behavioural change.

Perhaps what is most disquieting is the evolving role of professional medical bodies within this ecosystem both globally, and increasingly in India. Clinical guidelines are being updated with growing frequency, sometimes annually, often generating anticipation around new therapies. The interval between a drug's introduction and its inclusion in standard treatment protocols appears to be shrinking. Inclusion in such guidelines almost guarantees widespread adoption and commercial success. While scientific progress must be embraced, the pace of endorsement raises important questions: are these recommendations grounded in robust, long-term evidence, or are they shaped by the forces influencing markets and public discourse?

> One of the most fundamental drivers of the obesity epidemic – the expansion of ultra-processed foods –receives comparatively limited attention

Meanwhile, one of the most fundamental drivers of the obesity epidemic – the rapid expansion of ultra-processed foods –receives comparatively limited attention. In India, this sector has grown at an annual rate of around 13% between 2011 and 2021. These products, aggressively marketed and widely accessible, shape dietary habits from an early age, fuelling the very conditions the pharmaceutical industry seeks to treat. Yet policy responses remain hesitant. Front-of-package warning labels, for instance, continue to face delays.

Thus, we inhabit a deeply paradoxical ecosystem. One industry promotes consumption patterns that drive metabolic disease. Another offers pharmaceutical remedies. A third emerges to treat the side effects of those remedies. From a market perspective, this system is efficient, profitable, and self-sustaining. From a public health perspective, it is profoundly misaligned with the goal of durable well-being.

Shift in perspective

Reclaiming the narrative of health demands a shift in perspective. Medicines must be recognised as adjuncts, and not substitutes, for foundational interventions such as a nourishing diet, increased physical activity, sufficient and restorative sleep, and stress management. Greater transparency about the risks of newer therapies is not just desirable but absolutely essential. At the same time, there must be stronger, evidence-based advocacy to restore lifestyle modification to the centre of clinical care. The medical profession must, above all, reaffirm its ethical compass.

Encouraging fitness among airline crew is not misguided. But if such measures become yet another entry point into a cycle of measurement, medication, and market-driven dependence, we risk losing sight of what health truly means. Anti-obesity drugs are not the destination; they are a signal revealing how deeply medicalisation is embedding itself into everyday life. This is a moment to pause, recalibrate, and reclaim health before medicine begins to define it.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Air India proposed BMI-based fitness norms (possible de-rostering/pay implications).
- Patent expiry of semaglutide → entry of multiple generic drugs in India.
- Rapid rise in obesity and metabolic disorders:
  - ~25% population overweight/obese
  - High burden of diabetes and hypertension
- Growing use of anti-obesity drugs such as tirzepatide and semaglutide.
- Concerns over increasing medicalisation of lifestyle diseases and pharma influence.

Key Points

- Rising Burden of Obesity:
  - Linked to ultra-processed foods, sedentary lifestyle, stress, poor sleep
  - Indian "thin-fat phenotype" → higher metabolic risk at lower BMI
- Pharmaceutical Expansion:
  - GLP-1 receptor agonists reduce appetite → significant weight loss
  - Rapid market growth after patent expiry
- Health Concerns:
  - 25–40% weight loss may include muscle loss (sarcopenia)
  - Long-term safety and sustainability uncertain
- Regulatory & Ethical Issues:
  - Surrogate advertising (indirect promotion)
  - Faster inclusion in clinical guidelines without long-term evidence
- Policy Gaps:
  - Delay in front-of-pack food labelling
  - Weak regulation of ultra-processed food industry
- Public Health Shift:
  - From preventive (diet, exercise) → curative (drug-based approach)

Static Linkages

- WHO & Asian BMI classification (lower thresholds for Indians)
- Double burden of malnutrition
- Epidemiological transition theory
- Article 47 – State's duty to improve public health
- FSSAI role in food safety and labelling
- Preventive vs curative healthcare approach
- Ethical principles: beneficence, non-maleficence

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Effective in managing obesity and related NCDs
- Reduces risk of diabetes, cardiovascular diseases
- Provides option where lifestyle measures fail

Concerns

- Over-medicalisation of lifestyle disorders
- Risk of sarcopenia and long-term side effects
- Weak regulatory oversight on drug promotion
- Ethical concerns over pharma influence on guidelines
- Neglect of root causes (dietary patterns, lifestyle)
- Inequality in access to expensive treatments

Way Forward

- Prioritise preventive healthcare (diet, exercise, behaviour change)
- Implement front-of-pack labelling for unhealthy foods
- Strengthen regulation of surrogate advertising
- Ensure evidence-based and transparent clinical guidelines
- Promote public awareness on risks of over-medication
- Adopt multi-sectoral approach (health + food industry + urban planning)

Mapping the legislative vacuum in India's heat crisis

The phenomenon of extreme heat in India has undergone a profound geographic and demographic shift, transitioning from a seasonal hardship to a systemic national crisis. Once confined largely to the arid northwest and central plains, heatwaves now regularly penetrate humid coastal corridors and traditionally temperate regions. The last two years recorded unprecedented temperatures, with over 57% of Indian districts now classified as heat-prone. However, while the thermal canopy covers the entire subcontinent, its impact is sharply divided by class, caste, and gender. For the affluent, heat is an inconvenience managed through private cooling; for the nearly 400-490 million informal workers, it is a systemic violation of the right to life and a driver of "thermal injustice."

Unlike those with private infrastructure, construction workers, street vendors, and delivery partners possess zero "cooling autonomy." For these individuals, as studies consistently demonstrate, even a small rise in temperature causes a significant drop in productivity and a corresponding loss of income. These workers are routinely forced to choose between their biological survival and their economic survival.

Evidence from the frontlines

Recent evidence from the frontlines has yielded harrowing testimonies of harm that underscore this inequality. Sanitation workers and waste pickers report that extreme ambient heat, combined with toxic fumes from unsegregated waste, creates hazardous micro-climates where temperatures can be up to 5% higher than in surrounding areas. Some workers have reported suffering severe physical burns on their hands and legs due to handling heated waste materials without protective gear. This 'climate-caste nexus' ensures that those in the most dehumanising roles are also the most exposed to lethal heat, yet they remain largely excluded from existing adaptation strategies.

Bhoomika Choudhury

Independent researcher and adviser on business and human rights, migration and labour rights

The government should launch suitable provisions for financial compensation to cover the loss of income incurred when heat extremes prevent work

These vulnerabilities are seen across sectors. Gig delivery partners operate under "algorithmic pressure" where time-sensitive penalties discourage rest even during red-alert periods. Construction workers face high metabolic heat generated by physical exertion, compounded by the heat from steel and concrete. Street vendors face the double blow of health deterioration and a drop in daily income as goods perish and customers retreat.

A profound legal and fiscal vacuum exacerbates this crisis. The Factories Act, 1948 protects only those in indoor "workrooms," while the new Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHWC) Code 2020 essentially erases outdoor heat. Although Section 23 of the Code allows the government to notify standards for weather, it does not mandate them, vesting the Centre with discretionary authority and no minimum safety floor.

And fiscally, since heatwaves are not currently on the Nationally Notified Disaster list, States are restricted by the '10% trap', where they can only utilise a small fraction of their State Disaster Response Fund for relief efforts.

However, from a worker's perspective, the issue remains one of occupational safety rather than just disaster management.

Addressing 'thermal injustice'

A comprehensive framework for legislative and executive action is required to bridge these gaps and transition from discretionary advisories to enforceable rights. This must begin with the formal acceptance of the 16th Finance Commission's recommendation to include heatwaves and lightning in the Notified National Disaster list for the 2026-31 period. Such a move would unlock the National Disaster Response Fund, bypass current spending restrictions, and convert early warnings from simple advisories into binding mandates for district administrations. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Labour and the India Meteorological Department must transition to the Heat Index, a metric combining temperature and relative humidity to reflect true human feel, as the primary legal trigger for declaring heatwaves. This is essential to ensure that coastal areas, which face the lethal combination of heat and humidity, are not at a disadvantage in national safety protocols.

Furthermore, the government must exercise its powers under Section 23 of the OSHWC Code to notify binding heat safety rules, including protected work-rest cycles, and the provision of specialised Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as insulated flasks, as a non-negotiable employer obligation. Based on the Supreme Court's *Ranjitsinh* (2024) ruling, the 'Right to Cool' must be recognised as a fundamental right under Article 21, necessitating that Urban Local Bodies establish suitable cooling shelters and free public water kiosks.

Specialised binding directives are needed for high-hazard occupations, such as sanitation and underground mining, to mitigate risks from toxic exposure. For the gig economy, digital platforms should be legally prohibited from imposing delivery time penalties during heat alerts, ensuring a statutory thermal safety net for workers currently excluded due to their 'contractor' status. Finally, the government should launch suitable provisions for financial compensation to cover the loss of income incurred when heat extremes prevent work. Innovative models, such as the Self-Employed Women's Association parametric heat insurance scheme, provide a viable blueprint for this transition. Heat governance must be reimagined as a core component of the social contract where thermal safety is a non-negotiable mandate of constitutional justice.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- India is experiencing a systemic rise in heatwaves, extending to coastal and previously moderate regions.
- Around 57% of districts are now heat-prone, indicating a nationwide climatic shift.
- Nearly 400–490 million informal workers are highly vulnerable due to occupational exposure.
- The issue reflects "thermal inequality", where vulnerable sections lack access to cooling and protection.
- Current legal and disaster management frameworks are inadequate to address the crisis.

Key Points

- Heatwaves now require assessment using Heat Index (temperature + humidity) rather than temperature alone.
- Informal workers (construction, sanitation, gig workers):
  - Face loss of income due to reduced productivity
  - Suffer health risks such as heatstroke, dehydration, burns
- Urban Heat Island effect intensifies heat exposure in cities
- Legal gaps:
  - Factories Act, 1948 → limited to indoor workplaces
  - OSHWC Code, 2020 → lacks mandatory heat safety provisions
- Disaster management limitations:
  - Heatwaves not included in Notified Disaster list
  - States restricted in SDRF usage (10% cap)
- Key policy suggestions:
  - Inclusion of heatwaves as disaster
  - Recognition of Right to Cool (Article 21)
  - Mandatory work-rest cycles and PPE for workers

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to Life includes right to health and dignity
- Directive Principles – Article 39(e), 42 (worker protection and humane conditions)
- Disaster Management Act, 2005
- State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) & National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF)
- Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020
- Heat Action Plans (NDMA guidelines)
- Urban Local Bodies – 74th Constitutional Amendment
- Climate change and urban heat island effect (NCERT Geography)

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Disaster classification can unlock financial resources (NDRF)
- Rights-based approach strengthens constitutional protection
- Adoption of Heat Index improves scientific accuracy

Challenges

- Enforcement issues in informal and gig sectors
- Fiscal burden on governments
- Lack of binding labour safety standards
- Weak data systems on heat-related health impacts

Way Forward

- Notify heatwaves as Notified Disaster
- Frame mandatory heat safety standards under labour laws
- Adopt Heat Index-based warning systems
- Develop cooling infrastructure:
  - Cooling shelters
  - Public drinking water facilities
- Introduce income protection/insurance schemes
- Strengthen and legally back Heat Action Plans
- Promote climate-resilient urban planning (green cover, cool roofs)

Reservation ruse

Women's empowerment is an excuse to undermine federal equity

In a Parliament sitting convened from April 16, the Union government is seeking to advance women's empowerment, but as part of a wider legislative package: the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, and a companion Delimitation Bill. The stated rationale is the operationalisation of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (the 106th Amendment of 2023), which reserves one-third of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats for women but was tied to a post-Census delimitation. The government's insistence on bundling women's reservation with delimitation suggests that the former is being used as political cover for the latter: a sweeping reallocation of Lok Sabha seats that would reshape the federal composition of Parliament to the advantage of States where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) enjoys electoral dominance, and at the expense of States where it has been historically weak.

When India's decennial Census was delayed for more than five years without a definitive or rational explanation from the BJP-led Union government, the political logic was not hard to discern. The 2021 Census was first postponed citing COVID-19, but no reason was offered for the successive deferrals that followed, until it was quietly announced that the exercise would be carried out in 2026-27. Under the Constitution, the freeze on inter-State distribution of Lok Sabha seats, pegged to the 1971 Census, was set to expire only after the first Census conducted after the year 2026 was published. This meant that in the normal course, delimitation would have been based on the 2031 Census. By delaying the Census to 2026-27, the government ensured that the delimitation exercise could be initiated on its preferred timeline, using the 2026-27 Census rather than one conducted in 2031.

Now, perhaps realising that any delimitation exercise would itself take years to conclude after the 2026-27 Census, and therefore not be ready even for the 2029 Lok Sabha elections, the government appears to be in a tearing hurry to proceed with delimitation on the basis of the last completed Census, that of 2011. The 131st Amendment Bill amends Articles 55, 81, 82, 170, 330, 332, and 334A of the Constitution. Its most consequential changes are the following. First, it raises the ceiling on Lok Sabha membership from 530 elected members from States and 20 from Union Territories to 815 and 35 respectively, to a potential House of 850. Second, it replaces the existing constitutional definition of "population", which specifies the 1971 Census for seat allocation and the 2001 Census for boundary demarcation, with an open-ended formulation: population shall mean the Census "as Parliament may by law determine." The choice of which Census to use is no longer left to the Constitution but will depend on ordinary legislation, changeable by simple majority. Third, it deletes the third proviso to Articles 82 and 170 entirely. A freeze on seat allocation that has been in place since the 42nd Amendment of 1976, and extended by the 84th Amendment of 2001, guaranteed States that had stabilised their populations that they would not lose parliamentary seats as a consequence. This safeguard is now removed.

Members of the Union Cabinet, including Home Minister Amit Shah and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, had assured the country that the existing proportion of seats held by each State will be maintained through a uniform increase. But this assurance finds no place in the constitutional amendment. Article 81(2)(a), retained unchanged, mandates that the ratio between seats and population shall be the same for all States "so far as practicable" which is a population-proportionality requirement and does not preserve existing proportions.

Based on 2011 Census data, a purely population-proportional allocation to an 850-seat House would produce sharply unequal increases across regions. The Hindi-heartland States (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, and Delhi), which currently hold 207 of 543 seats, would secure 366 – a 77% increase, with their share rising from 38.1% to 43.1%. The southern States (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, and Puducherry), with 132 seats now, would receive only 176, a 33% increase, while their share would drop from 24.3% to 20.7%. The eastern States would slip from 14.4% to 13.7%; the North-East from 4.4% to 3.8%. The west and the northern non-Hindi States would remain roughly unchanged. States that spent decades building their health infrastructure, educational access, and women's agency that brought fertility down now face a reduction in their share of democratic power, while States that lagged on these indicators stand to gain the most seats. The already weakened fiscal federalism would now be compounded by diminished political representation for socio-economically advanced States.

That this legislation is being rushed through, with barely any time for public debate, just days before voters in two crucial States go to the polls, makes the timing even more suspect. There is no reason why women's reservation cannot be implemented within the existing 543-seat Lok Sabha by designating constituencies for women on a rotational basis, an approach the Opposition had pressed for after the passage of the 106th Amendment. MPs from States that stand to lose proportional representation in the Lok Sabha must resist the bulldozing of legislation on an issue that strikes at the federal foundations of the Indian Union. The consequences of letting this amendment pass are too grave to contemplate.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Union Government has introduced the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 along with a Delimitation Bill to operationalise the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam.
- The 106th Amendment provides 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, but its implementation is linked to delimitation after Census.
- The Bill proposes expansion of Lok Sabha strength (~850 seats) and removal of the freeze on inter-State seat allocation.
- It allows Parliament to decide which Census data to use for delimitation, instead of a fixed constitutional basis.
- This may lead to redistribution of seats among States based on population changes, impacting federal balance.

Key Points

- Articles amended: 55, 81, 82, 170, 330, 332, 334A
- Lok Sabha strength: From 543 → up to ~850
- Seat allocation principle: Population-based (Article 81)
- Freeze removal: Ends protection given by 42nd (1976) & 84th (2001) Amendments
- Population definition: To be decided by Parliament through law

- Women's reservation: Conditional upon delimitation exercise
  - Regional impact (based on 2011 Census trends):Northern States → gain seats
  - Southern States → decline in proportional share

Static Linkages

- Article 81 – Composition of Lok Sabha
- Article 82 – Readjustment after Census
- Article 170 – State Assembly composition
- 42nd Amendment Act, 1976 – Freeze on seat allocation
- 84th Amendment Act, 2001 – Extension of freeze
- Delimitation Commission – Statutory body
- Principle of "one person, one vote"

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Promotes gender equality through political reservation
- Ensures fair representation based on population changes
- Expands Lok Sabha → improves representational capacity
- Strengthens democratic principle of equal representation

Concerns

- Federal imbalance: Penalises States that achieved population control
- Delayed implementation: Women's reservation dependent on delimitation
- Discretionary power: Parliament deciding Census weakens constitutional clarity
- Political implications: May favour certain regions electorally
- Reduced voice of developed States in national decision-making

Way Forward

- Implement women's reservation immediately without waiting for delimitation
- Develop a balanced formula (population + development indicators)
- Ensure wide consultation with States
- Strengthen institutional independence of delimitation process
- Conduct timely and transparent Census
- Protect federal balance through constitutional safeguards

For US and Iran, there are three crucial issues — all can be resolved

KANTI BAJPAI

WHILE THE Iran-US talks in Islamabad failed, a deal was and is in plain sight. That the Iranians and Americans sent high-level delegations suggests that the two sides had already made substantial progress towards a deal. Both were in search of clinching commitments from the other but failed to get them. The meeting was not necessarily a waste of time, though, and we should not easily conclude that Tehran and Washington were insincere. There are times when real differences exist, and bridging those differences can be a genuine challenge.

In the aftermath of the Islamabad talks, US President Donald Trump has initiated a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and promised to resume air attacks on Iran. Those and other actions could jeopardise the prospects of a peace deal, but they may also strengthen the imperatives for a deal.

What is the deal that was in plain sight and that could yet eventuate?

Going into the Islamabad meeting, three issues were crucial: Iran's highly enriched uranium (HEU) and its nuclear future; the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz; and Israel's war in Lebanon.

Iran has about 400 kg of HEU enriched to a 60 per cent level. Enriched further to the right level, this could be enough for 10-12 nuclear bombs. There are only three ways that the HEU can be removed from Iran — by conquering the country or by regime change; by a military raid; or by Iranian co-operation. If we rule out conquest or regime change, neither of which looks anywhere near possible, the only realistic options are an extraction raid or Iran handing the HEU over to the US.

There is a view that the US's combat search and rescue (CSAR) mission on April 3 to bring home its downed airman was also an attempt at removing Iran's HEU. This is almost certainly wrong. The US armed contingent reportedly consisted of 200 special forces personnel, a number that is too small to have located and removed up to 400 kilograms of HEU in a hostile environment, especially if the HEU is dispersed to various sites.

What is plausible is that in addition to the CSAR mission, the Americans attempted a military probe to assess whether an HEU raid is feasible. In the event, US forces came under heavy fire, lost two C-130 transport aircraft, and four helicopters. A real HEU raid would be much larger, more visible, and more targetable than the April 3 operation. If so, its chances of success, against Iranian forces ready and waiting, including at heavily protected nuclear sites, are low.

If the HEU cannot be extracted, Iran must hand it over. Under the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran, the US, and others, the HEU problem was to have been dealt with in several ways. But the JCPOA is anathema to Trump and the Republican Party, and any resurrection of it seems politically impossible.

> Iran's militarisation of the strait is aimed at exercising strategic leverage and at generating funds to rebuild damaged infrastructure. With a peace deal, the need for leverage would disappear

The only option, then, is for Iran to hand over the HEU — but for a price. That price is the lifting of all US nuclear sanctions. To sweeten the deal further, the US could help rebuild Iran's electricity-generation capabilities.

Removing the HEU is only part of a deal to ensure that Iran does not go nuclear. The other part, Trump has insisted, is for Tehran to convincingly renounce nuclear weapons capability by committing not to enrich uranium beyond 3.67 percent — the US reportedly wants a 20-year commitment, Iran a five-year commitment.

Leaving aside the time-period issue, convincingly renouncing nuclear weapons is only possible either through regime change or the current regime's acceptance of full-scope safeguards under the IAEA (or some other arrangement).

Since regime change is unlikely, full-scope safeguards or more limited, critical safeguards are the way to go. Washington has little faith in the IAEA and other inspectors in this regard. Iran-US joint inspections would then seem to be the only possibility. If Iran can hand over its HEU to the US for a price, can it not also accept joint bilateral inspections?

The second key part of the Iran-US talks was about Hormuz. Here too there was daylight. Prior to the talks in Islamabad, Trump had suggested that the US could join Iran in a joint venture to enable safe passage of maritime traffic and to share revenue from a toll.

India and others have opposed a toll on shipping. A toll would contravene international law and set a dangerous precedent. Littoral countries elsewhere could come into conflict, as they each separately charge a toll. For shippers, and perhaps insurers as well, toll charges would be disastrous, financially and procedurally.

There is still room to resolve the Hormuz problem. Iran's militarisation of the strait is aimed at exercising strategic leverage and at generating funds to rebuild damaged infrastructure. With a peace deal, the need for leverage would disappear. As for the funding of Iran's infrastructure, the US could help by lifting all non-nuclear sanctions and by releasing frozen Iranian assets (in partnership with others who have sanctioned Iran).

Finally, ending Israel's war in Lebanon may be achievable. On April 9, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu offered peace talks with Hezbollah aimed at the militia's disarmament. While Hezbollah rejected the offer of talks, Iranian and US pressure on their respective allies could bring them to the table. As part of an Iran-US peace deal, Tehran and Washington would commit to bring about an Israel-Hezbollah negotiation within a stipulated period.

In sum, all may not yet be lost.

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Recent high-level talks between Iran and the United States failed despite indications of prior progress.
- The U.S. announced a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and hinted at renewed military action.
- Negotiations revolved around:
  - Iran's stockpile of Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU)
  - Maritime security in the Strait
  - Wider regional tensions (Israel–Hezbollah)
- Iran currently holds ~400 kg of uranium enriched to 60%, close to weapons-grade level.

Key Points

- Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU)
  - 60% enrichment significantly reduces time needed to reach weapons-grade (~90%).
  - Stockpile sufficient for ~10–12 nuclear weapons.
  - Most feasible solution: negotiated surrender of HEU in exchange for sanctions relief.
- Nuclear Deal Dynamics
  - US position: long-term cap (3.67%) on enrichment.
  - Iran's position: shorter commitment duration.
  - Monitoring dilemma: IAEA-led vs bilateral verification.
- Strait of Hormuz Significance
  - Handles ~20% of global oil trade → critical for global energy security.
  - Any disruption directly impacts oil prices and supply chains.
  - Proposal for toll-based passage contradicts international law (UNCLOS norms).
- Sanctions and Incentives
  - Iran demands removal of nuclear and economic sanctions.
  - Possible incentives: release of frozen assets, infrastructure assistance.
- Regional Dimension
  - Israel–Hezbollah conflict linked with broader Iran–US engagement.
  - Scope for negotiated de-escalation through external pressure.

Static Linkages

- Nuclear non-proliferation norms and global treaties
- Role and mandate of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)
- Freedom of navigation under international maritime law
- Strategic importance of choke points in global trade
- Sanctions as a tool of foreign policy
- West Asian geopolitics and proxy conflicts

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Diplomatic resolution can prevent nuclear escalation
- Ensures stability in global oil markets
- Reduces risk of wider regional war

Concerns

- US blockade may escalate into direct conflict
- Deep trust deficit hampers negotiations
- Weakening of multilateral institutions (IAEA bypass)
- Toll proposal undermines established maritime norms

Key Challenges

- Verification of nuclear commitments
- Domestic political opposition in both countries
- Interlinkages with proxy conflicts
- Legal legitimacy of maritime control measures

Way Forward

- Negotiate a revised nuclear agreement with phased obligations
- Reinforce IAEA's central role in verification
- Uphold UNCLOS principles ensuring free navigation
- Promote multilateral diplomacy involving major powers
- Link sanctions relief to verifiable compliance
- Encourage regional dialogue to address proxy conflicts

India has a chance to be Asia's gateway for global capital

Harsh Singhal

TENSIONS in West Asia have cast a shadow over global markets, raising concerns around inflationary pressures and energy security. As investors seek stable, high-growth alternative locations, India has an opportunity to position itself as the definitive gateway for global capital.

Asia accounts for 55 per cent of global GDP and drives 60 per cent of global growth. The capital flows that follow this gravitational shift need a credible, safe, and well-regulated gateway. For this discussion, let us call this capital Global Gateway Capital, or GGC — an international capital that is managed from a regional hub to invest across Asia and the world. To put this in perspective, Singapore is home to $6 trillion of capital — a large part of it uses Singapore as a hub and gateway for investments in Asian countries. Much as FDI and FII became defined policy categories, GGC deserves formal recognition. India should build policy and infrastructure to attract such capital.

Post-Covid, global capital started looking at Dubai as Asia's alternative financial gateway beyond Singapore and Hong Kong. It is estimated that $2 trillion of family and fund wealth is managed from the city. The geopolitical scenario puts the region's safe-haven status at risk. While Singapore and Hong Kong will attract some of this reallocation, three structural advantages set India apart from other contenders for GGC.

First, institutional credibility: India is the largest democracy, with independent regulators and progressive reforms. Second, economic scale and diversity: At a projected GDP growth of more than 6 per cent, India is the world's fastest-growing major economy. An economy this large and diverse offers GGC depth of opportunity. Third, demographics: India will have 1.04 billion working-age persons by 2030 and will contribute 24.3 per cent of the world's incremental workforce over the next decade. This is the talent base a global financial hub looks for.

> The core principle is simple: Do not tax the gateway. Benefits to India will come from the second-order effects — the jobs, the investments, the technology, the capital that flows through GIFT into Asia and the world.

India has a strong foundation to become the base for investing in Asia. GIFT City's IFSC hosts over 1,034 registered entities with managed assets exceeding $100 billion. Over 310 Alternative Investment Funds are registered with total commitments crossing $26 billion. Under FEMA, GIFT entities are treated as offshore, giving them full capital account convertibility and free repatriation. A unified regulator, IFSCA, consolidates the powers of RBI, SEBI, IRDAI, and PFRDA. This gives India a unique positioning as a hub for capital coming to Asia. However, GIFT today is focused on capital flowing in and out of India. For it to attract GGC, India will need to make long-term decisions.

The core issue with GIFT is the absence of permanent, legislative certainty and a myriad of regulations. Tax holidays are currently extended in rolling five-year tranches, the latest running to 2030. Rolling extensions, however well intentioned, signal policy impermanence. Similarly, important exemptions on overseas income earned by funds registered at GIFT arrive via circulars and clarifications rather than statute. The physical infrastructure and amenities that attract international talent are still maturing.

The core principle is simple: Do not tax the gateway. Benefits to India will come from the second-order effects — the jobs, the investments, the technology, the capital that flows through GIFT into Asia and the world. Global financial gateways built their economies on the same principle.

The policy agenda centres on one overarching reform: A single comprehensive Act of Parliament that formally defines Global Gateway Capital as a distinct investment category (alongside FDI and FII). The Act should cover all key issues — permanently legislating GIFT's tax and regulatory framework, and superseding all other laws on tax, FEMA, and visa matters for GGC firms. It should provide a clear long-term tax exemption for capital that comes to GIFT City. A global fund manager who can point to an Act of Parliament — not a circular — as the legal basis for their tax treatment in India is part of a very different conversation. The Act should also enable a hybrid operating model — allowing GGC firms registered in GIFT to deploy their teams across major cities while GIFT's infrastructure matures. It should establish long-term visas for international financial professionals tied to GGC commitments, granting them tax exemption on their global income and on income earned through GGC funds. The Act should mandate regulatory bodies and ministries — RBI, SEBI, GST Council, MHA and others — to issue aligned standing clarifications within a fixed time frame

India has the fundamentals, the vehicle, and the moment to attract a large, transformative pool of GGC. What it needs is the political will to act boldly and at speed in this rare window of opportunity.

The author is a senior investment professional

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Rising geopolitical tensions in West Asia have:
  - Increased volatility in crude oil prices
  - Triggered global inflationary pressures
- Investors are reallocating capital towards stable and high-growth economies
- India is emerging as a potential financial gateway for global capital into Asia
- Traditional hubs include:
  - Singapore
  - Dubai
  - Hong Kong

Key Points

- Global Gateway Capital (GGC):
  - Refers to global capital managed via a regional hub for investments across countries
  - Currently not a formal policy category like FDI/FPI
- India's Structural Advantages:
  - Institutional credibility: Independent regulators like Reserve Bank of India, Securities and Exchange Board of India
  - Economic scale: Fastest-growing major economy (~6%+ GDP growth; Economic Survey)
  - Demographic dividend: Largest working-age population globally by 2030
- Role of IFSC (GIFT City):
  - GIFT City functions as India's IFSC
  - Key features:
    - Offshore treatment under Foreign Exchange Management Act
    - Unified regulator: International Financial Services Centres Authority
    - Full capital account convertibility
  - Hosts 1000+ entities; $100+ billion assets
- Key Issues:
  - Absence of permanent legislative framework (tax benefits via temporary extensions)
  - Regulatory uncertainty due to reliance on circulars
  - Infrastructure and ecosystem for global professionals still developing
- Policy Suggestion in News:
  - Enact a comprehensive law to:
    - Recognise GGC formally
    - Provide long-term tax certainty
    - Harmonise regulations across agencies
    - Facilitate global talent and capital mobility

Static Linkages

- Capital account convertibility and its implications
- FEMA (1999) and post-liberalisation reforms
- Role of financial intermediaries in economic growth
- Demographic dividend (NCERT – Indian Economy)
- SEZ and IFSC concepts
- Inflation linkage with crude oil prices

Critical Analysis

Opportunities:

- Attract large-scale global capital inflows
- Boost financial services sector and employment
- Enhance India's role in global financial architecture
- Reduce dependence on traditional hubs

Challenges:

- Competition from established financial centres
- Policy unpredictability affecting investor confidence
- Infrastructure and urban ecosystem gaps
- Risk of regulatory arbitrage and tax base erosion

Way Forward

- Enact a stable and comprehensive legal framework for GGC
- Ensure predictable and competitive tax regime
- Strengthen GIFT City infrastructure and global standards
- Improve ease of doing business in financial sector
- Promote skilled workforce and global talent mobility
- Enhance coordination among regulators via IFSCA

Workers' protests underline precarity

ON MONDAY, protests involving thousands of factory workers turned violent across the industrial belt in Noida. Over the past few months, workers' protests have also taken place in other cities in North India — in February in Barauni in Bihar's Begusarai district, and in March in Surat, Gujarat and Manesar, Haryana. The common thread that runs through them is the demand for higher minimum wages, overtime payments and better working conditions. While the violence is to be condemned, the larger message from these episodes of labour unrest is of the precarity of livelihoods — of subdued wage growth, juxtaposed with the steep rise in the cost of living, and of the absence of adequate safety nets.

In recent weeks, workers have seen their already precarious financial position worsen due to the dislocations in global energy markets. This has led to disruptions in LPG supplies in India and the emergence of a huge black-market premium for securing gas cylinders. Alongside, there have been reports of units across the country either scaling down or halting production. This has had implications for jobs and incomes. The energy shock has been so severe that migrants from many urban centres have reportedly been returning to their villages. These episodes are not just limited to those working in factories. Towards the beginning of this year, gig workers engaged by online platforms had organised strikes to protest against uncertainty of wages, absence of transparency and unsafe working conditions.

On March 9, the Haryana government revised the minimum wages with effect from April 1, 2026, following the labour protests in Manesar and Faridabad. In Uttar Pradesh, a high-level committee was set up to resolve the issues between workers and industries, and on Tuesday, it followed Haryana, with the government announcing a hike in minimum wages with effect from April 1. While these actions may assuage the workers' more pressing demands, governments should not wait for matters to come to a head. Considering the imbalance in bargaining power, the concerns of workers must be heard and addressed before the situation worsens. A fair solution should be arrived at.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Widespread labour protests have emerged across key industrial regions such as Noida, Manesar, Surat, and Barauni.
- Workers are demanding higher minimum wages, overtime compensation, and improved working conditions.
- The protests reflect deeper structural concerns:
  - Rising inflation and cost of living
  - Stagnant or declining real wages
  - Weak social security for informal workers
- Global energy disruptions have worsened the situation:
  - LPG shortages and black-market premiums
  - Industrial slowdown leading to job and income losses
- Evidence of reverse migration from urban to rural areas.
- Gig workers have also protested against wage uncertainty and lack of transparency.
- State governments (Haryana, Uttar Pradesh) responded by revising minimum wages (April 2026).

Key Points

- Around 90% of India's workforce is informal → highly vulnerable (Economic Survey).
- Real wages are under pressure due to persistent inflation.
- Energy shocks have a multiplier effect:
  - Reduced production → job losses → demand contraction
- Code on Wages, 2019:
  - Universalises minimum wages
  - Introduces concept of a national floor wage
- Gig economy:
  - Rapidly expanding employment source
  - Limited regulatory and social security coverage
- Labour unrest indicates:
  - Weak collective bargaining
  - Gaps in labour law enforcement

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to livelihood (judicial interpretation)
- Article 43 (DPSP) – Living wage and humane working conditions
- Code on Wages, 2019 – Minimum wage framework
- Industrial Relations Code, 2020 – Dispute resolution
- Concepts:
  - Real vs nominal wages
  - Informal sector and disguised unemployment
  - Cost-push inflation
- Reports:
  - Economic Survey (employment trends)
  - NITI Aayog (gig economy)

Critical Analysis

Positives

- State intervention through wage revision shows administrative responsiveness
- Labour protests reflect democratic assertion of rights
- Policy attention on gig and informal workers is increasing

Challenges

- Predominance of informal employment limits policy effectiveness
- Weak enforcement of labour laws on ground
- Real wage stagnation amid inflation
- External shocks (energy crisis) disproportionately impact workers
- Gig workers remain inadequately protected

Stakeholder Concerns

- Workers: income security, dignity, safety
- Industry: rising labour costs, competitiveness
- Government: balancing growth with welfare
- Economy: demand slowdown due to reduced incomes

Way Forward

- Operationalise an effective national floor wage
- Expand universal social security (including gig and platform workers)
- Strengthen labour inspection and compliance mechanisms
- Promote formalisation through digital and fiscal incentives
- Institutionalise tripartite dialogue (government–industry–labour)
- Enhance energy security to minimise external shocks
- Focus on productivity-linked wage growth

Behind workers' protests: High costs, stagnant wages

Noida, Manesar have seen protests over wages in recent days. At their core are delays in wage hikes and confusion over new Labour Codes

Aanchal Magazine

THE PROTESTS by thousands of factory workers in Noida spiralled into violence on Monday, but their agitation seeking a minimum wage hike, better working conditions and overtime payments had begun on April 8 itself.

The immediate fuse was the notification of a 35% minimum wage hike in neighbouring Haryana on April 9 following a similar protest in the industrial hub of Manesar.

At the core of both protests, and others, is the spike in living expenses amid the West Asia war. This has been compounded by states' delays in revising the base minimum wage — one of two components that make up overall monthly minimum wage.

The revision of the base minimum wage is supposed to take place every five years. But Haryana revised it only after 10 years. Uttar Pradesh, which has now stepped in with an interim hike, had last revised it in 2012.

Before the revision, the overall monthly minimum wage of an unskilled worker in Haryana was Rs 11,274.60. It is now Rs 15,220.71, effective April 1.

The same for an unskilled worker in Uttar Pradesh was Rs 11,313. It is now Rs 13,690 in Noida (Gautam Buddha Nagar) and Ghaziabad, Rs 13,006 for unskilled workers in municipalities, and Rs 12,356 for other regions, in the interim.

This brings us to the second component of the overall monthly minimum wage — cost of living. This variable component is supposed to be revised twice a year, in line with the the inflation rate for industrial workers — measured by the Consumer Price Index-Industrial Workers (CPI-IW).

While most states carried out these half-yearly revisions, they have missed out on the base minimum wage revisions, especially in the years after Covid-19.

Rising cost of living

According to CPI-IW data, with the latest updated base year of 2016, the all-India inflation rate for industrial workers was 24.8% between February 2021 and February 2026.

In Haryana, the inflation rate during this period was 27.9% in Gurugram and 27.2%% in Faridabad. In Uttar Pradesh, this figure was 27.4% in Ghaziabad and Noida. And Delhi saw the inflation rate for industrial workers rise by 27.4% between February 2021 and February 2026.

In comparison, the overall minimum wage rate in Haryana increased by just 15% from Rs 9,803.24 in July 2021 to Rs 11,274.60 in July 2025 (before the April 2026 revision). Similarly, for Uttar Pradesh, the minimum wage for unskilled workers increased by 24.6% from Rs 9,078 in April 2021 to Rs 11,313 in April 2026 (before the interim revision announced on Tuesday). For Delhi, the minimum wage rate increased by 20.6% from Rs 15,310 in April 2020 to Rs 18,456 in April 2025.

The minimum wage revisions have, therefore, clearly not kept pace with the inflation rate for industrial workers in Delhi-NCR. The impact has worsened in recent times as several industrial units have been reeling under input cost pressures, first owing to the US tariffs and now with the Strait of Hormuz closure.

This has resulted in delayed payments to workers and uncertainties regarding their jobs in many cases. The pinch of the West Asia war is being felt by these factory workers, many of whom are migrants. They often have to rely on the black market for LPG cylinders where the price can be as high as Rs 4,000. This, along with a rise in room rents and cooked food prices from outside, has added to their burden.

Labour codes

A common thread in the concerns raised by the workers during the protests in Noida and Manesar was that there was a certain expectation of the wages going up after the notification of the four Labour Codes in November 2025, which did not happen. In a statement Tuesday, the Uttar Pradesh government clarified that claims about a uniform minimum wage of Rs 20,000 per month are incorrect.

Several social media posts and workers have picked up information from a September 26, 2024 Union government release which stated that the minimum wage rates in 'area A' for workers in construction, sweeping, cleaning, loading & unloading for unskilled work will be Rs 783 a day, or Rs 20,358 per month. This rate, however, was only for central sphere establishments.

There is also a lack of clarity among factory workers regarding their working hours and rest intervals as the final rules by most states, modelled on the four Labour Codes notified in November 2025, are yet to be notified by the Centre or most states even as draft rules have been put out for public comment.

Effective November 21, 2025, the four labour codes — Code on Wages, Code on Social Security, Industrial Relations Code, and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code — seek to ease regulations and compliance norms for employers, and ensure uniformity in wage structure and social security protection for workers.

However, the draft rules were issued by the Centre in December 2025 and final rules are yet to be notified. Unlike the earlier Factories Act, 1948, which specifically provided for the daily and weekly working hours, and 'spread-over' hours — the total working hours of an employee inclusive of rest breaks — the new Labour Codes define a workday of eight hours and a weekly working limit of 48 hours, which is in line with International Labour Organization norms.

In its draft rules issued in December, the Union government had stated that it would separately notify the period of work in each day, with intervals and spread overs, from time to time. This was intended to provide flexibility to employers who, for instance, may want to give a three-day weekly holiday to their employees with a 12-hour shift for four working days.

But this has resulted in confusion among employers as well as employees, often resulting in more work in the name of flexibility, experts said.

"The recent labour law reforms have shifted the power to create regulations from Parliament to the executive, enabling state governments to respond to the market needs. Unlike the earlier labour laws that specified the working hour limit, the new codes have kept it flexible and made it a part of rules. But this is being abused by employers in the name of flexibility, with some sectors such as IT even seeing employees work all-year round. The government has not notified the rules for labour codes, which are very important for the implementation part of any law. In the process, there has been an unexpected damage to lawmaking," said K R Shyam Sundar, labour economist and former professor at XLRI.

The new labour codes also leave the recognition of trade unions to states as well as the provision for collective bargaining, due to which no credible process is being followed for the labour law reforms, he added. "If X states notify the new minimum wage rates and working hours and Y states do not, the process will create regional disparities. Centre should have specified the details in the Codes itself," Shyam said.

The Factories Act capped the spread-over hours at 10.5 hours a day, extendable to 12 hours with written permission from Chief Inspector, and the daily working hours at nine hours a day. During the pandemic, many states including Rajasthan, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh increased the working time to 10-12 hours.

As per the draft rules of the new Labour Codes, "no worker shall be required or allowed to work in an establishment for more than 48 hours in any week. The period of work in each day... with intervals and spread overs, shall be as notified by the Central Government."

While these rules would apply to central sphere establishments, it is a final notification by states that would apply to establishments such as factories.

Punching the clock

The new Labour Codes have defined an eight-hour working day and a weekly work limit of 48 hours

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In the draft rules in December, the Centre said it would separately notify the period of work in each day, with intervals and spread-overs, from time to time

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Though it gives flexibility, it has also led to confusion among employers and employees

• INFLATION AND WAGES: OUT OF STEP

Inflation rate for industrial workers
(Consumer Price Index-Industrial Workers)

(Between Feb 2021 and Feb 2026)	
Delhi	**27.40%**
Haryana	Gurugram: **27.9%**, Faridabad: **27.2%**
Uttar Pradesh	Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar: **27.4%**
Gujarat	Ahmedabad: **30.6%**, Surat: **23.4%**
Maharashtra	Mumbai: **20.4%**, Nashik: **28.6%**
Karnataka	Bengaluru: **26.3%**, Hubli-Dharwad: **23.8%**
Tamil Nadu	Chennai: **16.7%**, Coimbatore: **24.7%**

SOURCE: LABOUR BUREAU

Overall monthly minimum wage
(for unskilled workers)

	2020	2026
Delhi	Rs 15,492	Rs 18,456
Haryana	Rs 9,458.20	Rs 15,220.71
Uttar Pradesh	Rs 8,758	Rs 13,690
Gujarat	Rs 8,429.20-8,637.20	Rs 13,325
Maharashtra	Rs 9,764-10,957	Rs 12,728-13,921
Karnataka	Rs 11,304.80-12,882.63	Rs 14,559.2-16,137.03

SOURCE: SIMPLIANCE

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Large-scale protests by factory workers in Noida and Manesar (April 2026).
- Key demands:
  - Increase in minimum wages
  - Payment of overtime wages
  - Improvement in working conditions
- Immediate trigger: Haryana's 35% minimum wage hike, raising expectations in neighbouring states.
- Structural causes:
  - Rising cost of living due to inflation and global disruptions (West Asia crisis)
  - Delay in revision of base minimum wages
  - Lack of clarity regarding implementation of Labour Codes (2025)

Key Points

- Minimum Wage Structure in India
  - Two components:
    - Base Wage (revised every 5 years)
    - Variable Dearness Allowance (VDA) (linked to CPI-IW; revised twice a year)
- Mismatch between Wages and Inflation
  - CPI-IW inflation (2021–2026): ~24–28%
  - Wage increase lagging behind → decline in real income
- Recent Wage Revisions
  - Haryana: ₹11,274 → ₹15,220
  - Uttar Pradesh (Noida): ₹11,313 → ₹13,690 (interim)
- Labour Codes (Notified November 2025)
  - Code on Wages
  - Code on Social Security
  - Industrial Relations Code
  - Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code
- Working Hours Norms
  - 8-hour workday
  - 48-hour weekly limit (aligned with ILO standards)
  - Flexibility in shift structure (e.g., 12-hour shifts)
- Major Issues
  - Delay in final notification of rules
  - Confusion over minimum wage levels (₹20,000 claim incorrect for all sectors)
  - Interstate variation in implementation
  - Increased employer flexibility → potential worker exploitation

Static Linkages

- Article 43: Living wage and humane working conditions
- Labour → Concurrent List (Centre + State jurisdiction)
- Minimum Wages Act, 1948 → subsumed under Code on Wages
- CPI-IW → compiled by Labour Bureau
- Concept: Real Wage vs Nominal Wage
- ILO standard: 8 hours/day, 48 hours/week

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Consolidation of labour laws → simplification
- Promotes ease of doing business
- Flexibility may enhance productivity
- Wage hikes show responsiveness of states

Concerns

- Wage growth not keeping pace with inflation
- Delay in implementation of Labour Codes
- Flexibility may lead to longer working hours
- Regional disparities due to state-level variations
- Weak collective bargaining mechanisms
- Migrant workers most affected by rising living costs

Way Forward

- Expedite notification of Labour Code rules
- Ensure time-bound revision of minimum wages
- Strengthen inflation indexation (CPI-IW linkage)
- Introduce an effective national floor wage framework
- Improve enforcement and inspection mechanisms
- Promote tripartite consultations (government–employers–workers)
- Strengthen social security for migrant labour