DAILY NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

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CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH

Iran says blockade a threat to ceasefire; warns it will shut down Red Sea traffic

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran's military threatened on Wednesday to shut down Red Sea trade unless the U.S. lifted its naval blockade on Tehran's ports, saying the ceasefire was at risk.

The head of Iran's military central command centre said a U.S. failure to lift the blockade would constitute "a prelude" to violating the two-week ceasefire. Unless the U.S. relents, Iran's armed forces "will not allow any exports or imports to continue in the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, and the Red Sea," Iranian General Ali Abdollahi said.

The warning came after U.S. President Donald Trump indicated peace negotiations could resume this week, while Iran confirmed the sides had kept talking via Pakistan after a first round of negotiations fell flat. Iran on Wednesday welcomed a Pakistani delegation led by its Army chief Asim Munir.

Islamabad "has held discussions with the Americans and has also heard our stances. During this visit the views of both sides are to be discussed in detail," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said.

Washington has sought to turn the screws on Tehran with the blockade, with U.S. Central Command saying that American forces "have completely halted economic trade going into and out of Iran by sea".

The picture based on recent maritime tracking data in the Strait of Hormuz was less clear-cut, and Iran's Tasnim news agency reported on Wednesday that shipping had continued from southern Iran.

Speaking to the *New York Post* on Tuesday, Mr. Trump said a new round of talks with Iran could take place in Pakistan "over the next two days", while telling Fox Business the war was "very close to being over".

Reports said the U.S. had sought a 20-year suspension of Iran's uranium enrichment programme during the Islamabad talks, and that Iran, in turn, proposed suspending its nuclear activity for five years – an offer U.S. officials rejected.

Pakistan's Army chief Asim Munir receives a warm welcome from Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in Tehran on Wednesday. AFP

LEADERS FLOCK TO CHINA
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KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Iran has threatened to disrupt maritime trade routes in the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and Sea of Oman if the United States does not lift its naval blockade.
- The blockade is aimed at restricting Iran's maritime trade and economic activities.
- This development comes amid a fragile two-week ceasefire and ongoing indirect negotiations via Pakistan.
- Reports indicate disagreement over Iran's nuclear programme, especially uranium enrichment suspension timelines.
- Strategic chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz remain central to the crisis.

Key Points

- Iran has warned of blocking all imports and exports through key maritime routes.
- The U.S. claims it has effectively halted Iran's maritime trade, though shipping data suggests partial continuation.
- The Red Sea and Strait of Hormuz are critical for global oil and trade flows.
- Negotiations involve:
  - U.S. demand: 20-year suspension of uranium enrichment.
  - Iran's counter-offer: 5-year suspension.
- Pakistan is acting as a mediator in backchannel diplomacy.
- The crisis risks escalation into regional conflict affecting global energy security.

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz handles ~20% of global petroleum trade (Energy chokepoint – EIA data).
- Red Sea connects to Mediterranean via Suez Canal (major trade artery).
- UNCLOS guarantees freedom of navigation in international waters.
- Iran is a signatory to the NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty) but disputes obligations.
- Naval blockades may be considered an act of war under international law (San Remo Manual).

Critical Analysis

Pros / Strategic Rationale

- Iran aims to increase bargaining leverage in nuclear negotiations.
- Demonstrates capability to disrupt global supply chains, raising geopolitical importance.
- U.S. blockade pressures Iran economically, aligning with strategic containment policy.

Concerns / Risks

- Threatens global oil supply stability, leading to inflationary pressures.
- Escalation could lead to military confrontation in critical sea lanes.
- Disruption of trade impacts developing economies like India (energy imports).
- Undermines freedom of navigation principles under international law.

Stakeholders

- Gulf countries (regional stability)
- Major oil importers (India, China, EU)
- Global shipping industry
- International organizations (UN, IAEA)

Way Forward

- Promote multilateral diplomacy involving neutral mediators.
- Strengthen role of IAEA for nuclear verification and trust-building.
- Ensure adherence to UNCLOS principles for maritime security.
- Diversify energy sources (India's strategy: renewables, strategic reserves).
- Encourage regional security frameworks in West Asia.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

States' seats will rise 50% after delimitation: Centre

No State will lose current proportional strength in Parliament, says govt. functionary; while not mentioned in the draft Bills, Home Minister has assured party representatives of rise, official adds

Varghese K. George
NEW DELHI

All States will have their number of Lok Sabha seats increase by half after delimitation, and no State will lose its current proportional strength in Parliament, a senior government functionary told The Hindu on Wednesday.

He said Union Home Minister Amit Shah would clarify this in Parliament during the debate on the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill and the Delimitation Bill. The debate begins on Thursday.

"If there is any requirement for change in the language of the draft Bill, that too will be addressed," the government functionary said.

The drafts of the Bills have raised concerns that the States which have stabilised their population are set to lose their relative strength when the composition of the Lok Sabha is reapportioned between States as per the latest Census figures. Mr. Shah had assured party representatives, who met him in recent weeks that the strength of the Lok Sabha would increase by 50%, to be distributed across States in their existing proportions – that is, a 50% increase in the number of Lok Sabha seats from each individual State.

Missing details

However, this is not mentioned in the drafts of the Bills circulated by the government. In fact, the Bills propose an inter-State redistribution of Lok Sabha seats, which could make it impossible for current proportionate shares to be maintained.

The senior functionary said this was a misreading of the drafts. "Those who are reading bits and pieces and interpreting them as reducing the relative strength of the South are missing the big picture," the functionary said.

Asked how this position squares with the proposed amendments to the Constitution and the provisions of the Delimitation Bill, the functionary said everything would be explained during the parliamentary debate.

"There is no change in the assurance given by the government that all States will have their number of seats in the Lok Sabha increased by 50%. If Tamil Nadu has 39, it will have 58; Kerala has 20 and it will have 30," the functionary said, asking to wait for the mechanics of it to be explained in the Parliament.

MORE REPORTS
» PAGES 2 & 3

INDIA bloc leaders after a meeting to discuss the proposed Bills on Delimitation in New Delhi on Wednesday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

'INDIA bloc will vote against delimitation'

NEW DELHI
The INDIA bloc parties have decided to vote against the delimitation provisions in the proposed Bills, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said on Tuesday while underlining that the bloc's opposition is not against women's reservation. » PAGE 4

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Union Government has introduced the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 along with a Delimitation Bill.
- Proposal aims to increase Lok Sabha strength from 543 to ~850 seats (~50% increase).
- Government assurance (to be clarified in Parliament by Amit Shah):
  - Every State's seats will increase by ~50%.
  - No State will lose its existing proportional share.
- Concerns raised by States like Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Kerala:
  - Fear of relative decline in representation despite increase in absolute seats.
- Political opposition:
  - Naveen Patnaik and Sukhbir Singh Badal flagged threats to federal balance.

Key Points

- Expansion of Lok Sabha
  - Seats proposed: 543 → ~850.
  - Approx. 50% increase across all States.
- Delimitation Principle
  - Based on population (Article 81).
  - Ensures equal representation of citizens.
- Freeze on Delimitation
  - Based on 1971 Census since 1976.
  - Extended till 2026 (84th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2001).
- Core Issue
  - Tension between:
    - Population-based representation
    - Equity among States (federal balance)
- Concerns of States
  - States with lower population growth:
    - May see decline in relative share.
  - Fast-growing States:
    - Likely to gain greater political weight.
- Women's Reservation Link
  - Delimitation is a precondition for implementing reservation in legislatures.

Static Linkages

- Article 81: Composition of Lok Sabha.
- Article 82: Readjustment after Census.
- Delimitation Commission:
  - Statutory body appointed by President.
  - Orders have force of law (not challengeable in courts).
- 42nd Amendment Act (1976):
  - Freeze on seat allocation.
- 84th Amendment Act (2001):
  - Extended freeze till 2026.
- Federalism as Basic Structure:
  - Kesavananda Bharati case.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Enhances representative democracy.
- Reflects current population realities.
- Facilitates women's reservation implementation.
- Reduces malapportionment (unequal constituency sizes).

Concerns

- Penalizes States with effective population control.
- Risks regional imbalance in political power.
- Challenges cooperative federalism.
- Ambiguity in draft → trust deficit.

Constitutional Dilemma

- Equality of citizens vs equality of States.

Way Forward

- Develop a balanced formula:
  - Combine population with development indicators.
- Provide constitutional safeguards for States with controlled population growth.
- Ensure consensus-based approach via Inter-State consultations.
- Maintain transparency in delimitation methodology.
- Consider phased or hybrid models of representation.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Entry of 'fertile women' antithetical to the identity of Sabarimala deity, says temple board in top court

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said everybody is entitled to their individual conscience and no religion is superior to the other, even as the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) argued that the entry of "fertile women" between 10 and 50 years of age would be antithetical to the very manifestation and identity of the "special deity" at the Sabarimala temple in Kerala.

Appearing before a nine-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, for the TDB (which manages the shrine), said there were about 1,000 temples dedicated to Lord Ayyappa in India. The shrine at Sabarimala was the only one with the deity in the form of a *Naishtika Brahmachari* (perennial celibate).

Mr. Singhvi argued that the very foundation of the fame and prowess of the deity lay in the fact that Lord Ayyappa was in the *Naishtika Brahmachari* form. "The only reason people revere him is that he has eschewed all forms of *grihastashram* and embraced penance of a very high order. Worshippers observe *vratham*," Mr. Singhvi submitted.

Lord Ayyappa is in the *Naishtika Brahmachari* form at Sabarimala, says counsel.

He denied that women were excluded in toto. He said a "sub-classification" of women, that is, those aged between 10 years and 50 years, could not take the Sabarimala pilgrimage.

He submitted that the entry of "fertile women in this age group would be antithetical to the very manifestation and identity of the deity... They can visit Lord Ayyappa in the other 999 temples".

Justice B.V. Nagarathna orally observed that Article 25(2)(a) of the Constitution required "religious practices" to be left untouched.

She said Article 25 (freedom of conscience and religion) invoked equality for all religions. "No religion is superior to the other. Persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience. The truth is one. Scholars interpret it in different ways. That is why everybody is entitled to their individual conscience. Article 25 (1) recognises that no path or conscience is superior to any other path or conscience... You may follow any path you wish," Justice Nagarathna said.

Justice M.M. Sundresh said belief was at the core of religion. Even a religious denomination was only an entity which gave effect to the religious belief of individuals, he said.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- A nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India, headed by the Chief Justice, is hearing constitutional issues arising from the Sabarimala temple entry case.
- The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) argued that restricting entry of women aged 10–50 preserves the deity's nature as a Naishtika Brahmachari.
- The Court emphasized that Article 25 guarantees freedom of conscience and equality of all religions, and no belief system is superior.
- The case revisits the conflict between religious practices and fundamental rights.

Key Points

- Freedom of Conscience (Art 25):
  - Guarantees individual autonomy in matters of belief.
  - Applies equally across all religions.
- Nature of Restriction:
  - TDB claims restriction is not total exclusion but a limited age-based classification.
- Essential Religious Practice (ERP):
  - Core issue: whether the restriction is an essential religious practice deserving protection.
- Judicial Observations:
  - Religion is rooted in individual belief.
  - Constitution promotes pluralism, equality, and dignity.

Static Linkages

- Fundamental Rights are interdependent and sometimes conflicting.
- Equality provisions prohibit arbitrary discrimination.
- Religious freedom is not absolute and subject to reasonable restrictions.
- Courts interpret religious freedom using judicial doctrines.
- Secularism in India ensures equal respect for all religions.

Critical Analysis

In Favour of Restriction
- Protects denominational rights (Art 26)
- Maintains religious identity and tradition
- Avoids excessive judicial interference in faith

Against Restriction
- Violates equality and non-discrimination
- Contradicts constitutional morality
- May perpetuate gender exclusion

Key Constitutional Debate
- Faith vs Fundamental Rights
- Group Rights vs Individual Rights
- Judicial Review vs Religious Autonomy

Way Forward

- Develop clear and consistent standards for ERP doctrine
- Ensure gender justice without undermining religious freedom
- Promote constitutional morality as guiding principle
- Encourage community-led reforms
- Maintain judicial balance between intervention and restraint

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Women's reservation and delimitation should be delinked

Brinda Karat

is a senior leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)

Parliament is scheduled to discuss two far reaching Bills ostensibly for the implementation of the one-third reservation of seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. The Bills are the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill which seeks to raise the number of seats in Parliament to 850 seats with one-third reserved for women "after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken for this purpose", and The Delimitation Bill, 2026, which sets up the Delimitation Commission to redraw boundaries of existing seats on the basis of the "latest Census figures published on the date of the constitution of the commission", which is the 2011 Census. The government expects the Opposition to turn itself into a rubber stamp and approve utterly flawed proposals or be damned as being anti-women.

Unnecessary linkages

In September 2023, to blunt mounting criticism of its failure to legislate on women's reservation, the government hastily pushed through the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (NSVA) in a so-called "special session", just months before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. This legislation was markedly different from the Bill which had been adopted by the Rajya Sabha in 2010. If that Bill, which had gone through several rounds of parliamentary scrutiny, had been presented by the government, as it should have been, women's reservation could have been implemented from the 2024 elections itself. Instead, the Modi government, through the NSVA, linked women's reservation to the proposed Census and delimitation. During the ensuing debate almost all Opposition parties expressed concern that these unnecessary linkages would not only deny women the right of reservation in the 2024 Lok Sabha and subsequent Assembly elections but would put its implementation in limbo contingent on other factors. The government responded that Opposition fears were unfounded and that a Delimitation Commission would be set up after the 2024 elections and that the Census would be completed in time. None of this happened.

What did happen is that the number of women in Parliament after the 2024 elections decreased from 78 to 74 which is just 13.6% of the total House. Additionally, in 2024 and 2025, State Assembly elections were held in 10 States with a total of 1,276 assembly seats. Only 123 women, which is less than 10%, were elected. This is the real consequence of the unwarranted linkages introduced by the government.

The 131st Amendment Bill not only retains the flawed linkages of the NSVA, it adds a third linkage of increased seats. Thus in the name of women's reservation, the government wants to achieve three aims – first, it wants to scrap the principle of delimitation based on present population criteria by using the outdated 2011 Census as the base; secondly, by using the 2011 Census, it wants to take pressure off the urgency for a caste census; and finally, it wants women's reservation to be implemented only as part of a delimitation exercise whose aim is to redraw boundaries of seats to suit the ruling regime. That is, women's reservation is once again being held hostage to the fulfilment of other agendas.

The importance of Census data

Till now in India, all the four major national exercises of delimitation of the boundaries of seats have been based on the last available Census data. The number of Scheduled Castes (SC)/Scheduled Tribes (ST) reserved seats are based on the proportion of SC/ST communities in the total population. As per the 1971 Census, the absolute number of seats reserved for SCs and STs was 79 and 41 respectively. This increased by 11 seats after the 2001 Census and subsequent delimitation with 84 seats reserved for SCs and 47 for STs with their combined proportion in the population being 24.4%. From 2001 to 2026, the population would certainly have registered a bigger increase. In the name of urgency for women's reservation, implementing a delimitation exercise which ignores the current population of SCs and STs will be a *manuvadi* injustice to oppressed communities, denying them a fair increase in the proportion of reserved seats. It will negatively impact the women of these communities, since the numbers of seats constituting one-third of reserved seats for SC/ST women will also be less than their rightful share.

Delimitation is a highly politically and sensitive issue. The last national delimitation exercise took around six years to complete, from 2002 to 2008, and was implemented in the 2009 elections. Since then, two State-level delimitation exercises have been done for Assam and J&K, directly under the Election Commission of India. Both of these have been strongly criticised for the highly undemocratic and sectarian way in which the boundaries of the seats were redrawn violating the principles of the Delimitation Act, 2002. To put it plainly, in both States the interests of the central ruling regime were advanced by manipulating the creation of seats in such a way as to minimise the impact of voters of particular communities seen as being opposed to the ruling regime. It can be reasonably anticipated that the coming delimitation will be highly contested. Why should women's reservation be linked to such an exercise? Further, even if the proportion of the present number of seats in different States is to be maintained according to the present government proposal, questions still remain as to the disadvantages of States where population growth is less. All this needs further discussion and cannot be pushed through.

Betrayal of women's reservation

Women's reservation is a stand-alone step which requires a stand-alone law. The 2010 Bill adopted by the Rajya Sabha and supported by the then Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had no such linkages. I remember Sushma Swaraj, then the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, rushing to congratulate us, then in the Upper House, for the historic passage of the Bill even though she knew that her party would get no credit. But there are no women leaders in the BJP today who would have the courage to call the government out for this; the second betrayal of the women's reservation issue. The only reason that the government is insisting on such a linkage is because it wants to rush through the delimitation process in the name of implementing women's reservation. The onus of delay will be shifted to all those who object to the delimitation boundaries suggested by a Commission packed with government supporters which is what the composition of the proposed Bill suggests.

It is time to say no to the instrumentalisation of the issue of women's reservation. Women's reservation has been fought for by millions of women across India, for decades, to strengthen democracy, not by the denial of rights of SCs and STs and not by bulldozing democratic norms. Those committed to women's reservation must vote against these Bills. The solution lies in going back to the 2010 Bill without linkages to delimitation and the Census. A simple amendment to the 106 Constitution Amendment law passed in 2023 will suffice: in Clause 334A, delete the sentence, one-third reservation for women will commence "after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken for this purpose after the relevant figures for the first census taken after commencement of the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-eighth Amendment) Act, 2023 have been published". This will break the link. As far as increase of seats and delimitation is concerned, these are separate issues which should be discussed. As and when Parliament decides on an increase in seats, automatically the framework of women's reservation too will change. Our message to the government is: stop your manipulations, one-third reservation for women without linkages now.

Women's reservation is a stand-alone step which requires a stand-alone law

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Parliament is set to debate two major Bills:
  - Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill
  - Delimitation Bill, 2026
- The 131st Amendment proposes:
  - Increasing Lok Sabha seats to 850
  - Reserving 1/3rd seats for women, post-delimitation
- The Delimitation Bill proposes:
  - Redrawing constituencies based on 2011 Census data
- Earlier, the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (2023) linked women's reservation with:
  - Census
  - Delimitation
- Women's representation remains low:
  - Lok Sabha (2024): ~13.6%
  - State Assemblies: <10%

Key Points

- Women's reservation is not immediate, but conditional upon:
  - Census completion
  - Delimitation exercise
  - Increase in seats
- Use of 2011 Census raises concerns about:
  - Outdated population data
  - Misrepresentation of demographic changes
- SC/ST reservation linkage:
  - Based on population proportion from Census
  - Delimitation using old data may under-represent SC/ST communities
- Historical delimitation:
  - 1971 Census → SC (79), ST (41)
  - 2001 Census → SC (84), ST (47)
- Delimitation is politically sensitive:
  - Last exercise (2002–2008) took ~6 years
- Concerns of gerrymandering and political manipulation
- Women's reservation effectively delayed indefinitely

Static Linkages

- Article 81 – Composition of Lok Sabha
- Article 82 – Readjustment after Census
- Article 170 – State Legislative Assemblies
- Article 330 & 332 – Reservation for SC/ST
- Article 334 – Duration of reservation
- Delimitation Act, 2002
- 42nd Amendment – Freeze on delimitation (till 2001)
- 84th & 87th Amendments – Extension of freeze till 2026
- Principle of "One person, one vote, one value"
- Census as basis for representation

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Promotes gender inclusivity in governance
- Strengthens representative democracy
- Constitutional backing ensures institutional continuity
- Seat expansion may reduce political displacement

Concerns

- Delayed implementation due to multiple linkages
- Use of outdated Census data undermines fairness
- Potential dilution of SC/ST representation
- Risk of political manipulation in delimitation
- May create federal tensions
- Undermines urgency of women's political empowerment

Way Forward

- Implement women's reservation independently of delimitation
- Conduct updated Census at the earliest
- Ensure transparent, neutral Delimitation Commission
- Safeguard SC/ST proportional representation
- Build broad political consensus
- Consider time-bound implementation mechanism
- Promote capacity building of women leaders

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Implications of increasing the size of the Lok Sabha

M.R. Madhavan
Co-founder and President of PRS Legislative Research

The government has circulated a set of three Bills related to delimitation and women's reservation. These Bills are expected to be taken up in the extended Budget session from April 16-18, and could affect the working of Parliament in several ways. The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill proposes the following. The limit on the size of the Lok Sabha will be increased from 550 to 850. The number of seats for each State in the Lok Sabha will be based on its proportion in the population of all States. This population will be based on such Census (not necessarily the latest) that is specified by Parliament by passing a law. The Bill also clarifies that the reservation of one-third of seats for women will be effective after a delimitation, and will be valid for 15 years. The Delimitation Bill sets up a Delimitation Commission, and its provisions are similar to the last one set up in 2002. Importantly, it requires the latest published Census to be used. Therefore, the next delimitation is proposed to be based on the 2011 Census. The third Bill extends these provisions to the three Union Territories with legislatures: Delhi, J&K, and Puducherry.

Huge impact

There are several implications of these proposals. First, the freezing of seats until the first Census after 2026 has been removed. Instead, seats will be decided based on the 2011 Census. An immediate implication is that the relative share of seats in the Lok Sabha for each State will change. The biggest losers are Kerala and Tamil Nadu, while the main gainers are Rajasthan, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. While the proposal will equalise the value of the vote of every citizen regardless of their State of residence, it will lead to MPs from U.P. and Bihar (25% of total seats, up from 22%) having significant power to shape national policy.

Second, the Constitution Amendment Bill provides Parliament the flexibility to determine the periodicity of delimitation and the Census that will be used for the purpose. Currently, the Constitution requires delimitation after every Census, and to be based on that Census (currently, there is a freeze on this until 2026). The Amendment requires just a simple majority to determine whether to do delimitation, and which Census to use. The government of the day, as it would command the majority in the Lok Sabha, can effectively make this decision. They would need to pass it in the Rajya Sabha too, but that House will be weakened by the same Bill, which brings us to the third implication. While the size of the Lok Sabha is being increased, there is no proposal to change the size of the Rajya Sabha. This affects the relative importance of the two Houses. For example, if the two Houses disagree on a Bill, the President may summon a joint sitting. In such a scenario, each member of Parliament has one vote, so the Lok Sabha with 543 seats has 2.2 times the votes of the Rajya Sabha with 245 seats. If we assume that the Lok Sabha will now have 815 seats (an increase of 50%), it will have 3.3 times the strength of the Rajya Sabha. The effect can be seen with an example. Say, the government has 53% seats in the Lok Sabha (433 out of 815) and just 40% in the Rajya Sabha (98 out of 245 seats). The government will still be able to get its Bills through a joint session as it has a majority of total seats. This imbalance will also play out in elections to the offices of the President and the Vice-President, where each MP across both Houses has an equal vote.

A fourth implication is that the limit on the size of the Council of Ministers will increase. The Constitution was amended in 2003 to limit the Council's size to 15% of the Lok Sabha. If Lok Sabha is expanded to have 815 MPs, the limit on the size of the Central cabinet also increases from 81 to 122. Fifth, the increased size of the Lok Sabha reduces the opportunity for an MP to participate in the deliberations of the House. MPs ask questions to Ministers to hold them to account, and raise important issues in the zero hour. Questions and zero hour interventions are chosen by lottery, and an increased size of the Lok Sabha reduces the probability of getting balloted. The issue is exacerbated by the fact that Parliament sits for less than 70 days a year.

Global precedents

Other countries also have large legislatures. For example, the U.K. House of Commons has 650 members. It has evolved processes to provide opportunities to MPs to participate in discussions. It averages over 150 sittings a year, and also has a robust committee system. Parliamentary committees can supplement deliberations. However, the Indian Parliament is found lacking in this respect. For example, every Bill in the U.K. Parliament has to be examined by committees of both Houses. In India, less than a fifth of the Bills are referred to Committees.

Sixth, there could be a similar impact on State legislatures. Though these Bills do not have any provisions regarding the size of State legislatures, that decision will be taken by the Delimitation Commission. If they decide to follow the same rationale and increase the size by 50%, some States could have oversized legislatures. U.P. could end up having over 600 seats while West Bengal and Maharashtra could reach about 450.

These Bills will have significant impact on the composition of Parliament and its functioning, and are being introduced with no public discussion. It is imperative that such Bills go through intensive deliberation, both outside and inside Parliament. At the very least, they should be referred to a parliamentary committee, which can engage with experts and the wider public before giving its recommendations.

WOMEN'S RESERVATION

These Bills will have significant impact on the composition of Parliament and its functioning, and are being introduced with no public discussion

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Union government has introduced three key Bills related to delimitation and women's reservation.
- The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill proposes increasing the Lok Sabha strength from 550 to ~850.
- Delimitation to be conducted using a Census specified by Parliament (likely 2011 Census).
- Women's reservation (33%) to be implemented only after delimitation, valid for 15 years.
- A new Delimitation Commission will be set up; provisions extended to Delhi, J&K, Puducherry.

Key Points

- Lok Sabha Expansion
  - Increase to ~815–850 seats.
  - Alters legislative dynamics and representation.
- Population-based Redistribution
  - Seats allocated based on population share.
  - Gains: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan.
  - Loss: Tamil Nadu, Kerala.
- Delimitation Flexibility
  - Parliament can decide timing and Census basis.
  - Moves away from mandatory post-Census delimitation.
- Impact on Federalism
  - Population-heavy states gain dominance.
  - Concerns over imbalance between states.
- Lok Sabha vs Rajya Sabha
  - Rajya Sabha strength unchanged.
  - Joint sitting advantage increases for Lok Sabha.
- Council of Ministers
  - Ceiling (15%) increases → potential rise to ~120 ministers.
- Functioning of Parliament
  - Reduced participation opportunities for MPs.
  - Low sitting days aggravate issue.
- Women's Reservation
  - Deferred implementation (post-delimitation).
  - Time-bound (15 years).

Static Linkages

- Article 81 – Composition of Lok Sabha
- Article 82 – Delimitation after Census
- Article 75(1A) – 15% cap on Council of Ministers
- Article 170 – State Assembly composition
- 42nd Amendment – Freeze on delimitation
- 84th & 87th Amendments – Adjustments without altering seats
- Delimitation Commission (1952, 1962, 1972, 2002)
- Principle of "One Person, One Vote, One Value"

Critical Analysis

Pros

- Improves representational equity (equal vote value).
- Enables women's political representation.
- Reflects demographic changes.

Cons

- Penalises states successful in population control.
- Weakens federal balance.
- Enhances executive dominance (larger ministry).
- Reduces deliberative efficiency of Parliament.
- Rajya Sabha's relative importance declines.

Way Forward

- Adopt balanced formula (population + performance indicators).
- Strengthen Rajya Sabha role in federal structure.
- Increase parliamentary sittings (100+ days).
- Mandatory committee scrutiny of Bills.
- Ensure transparent and consultative process.
- Synchronise women's reservation with immediate implementation roadmap.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Dry days

As India faces a rainfall deficit, it must make preparations for the worst

After the crest, the trough is inevitable. Following two years of surplus rainfall, India is likely staring at a significant shortfall in the coming monsoon. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) in its April forecast has predicted an 8% deficit, or "below normal" rainfall, coming June-September. There is a five percent margin of error in this estimate but going by IMD's track record, there are many more times it has expected a 'normal' monsoon only for India to end up with a drought than it has forecast a drought and been proved wrong. In fact, when IMD warns of a deficit in April, history shows that India often experiences a drought. The agency, in its official lexicon, never uses the term 'drought' and only refers to a deficit below 90% as "deficient." In the April of 2015, IMD issued a "below normal monsoon" forecast for the 2015 southwest monsoon season, predicting seasonal rainfall at 93% of the long-term average, again, 'below normal.' India ended up much worse at 86% Long Period Average (LPA). IMD expects a depressed monsoon this time in the second crucial half of the monsoon (August and September) on the back of weather models indicating an El Nino, the cyclical phenomenon where a heating of the central equatorial Pacific Ocean beyond 1 degree Celsius has corresponded nine out 16 times since 1950 to a deficient monsoon.

The timing of an El Nino matters. If the temperature rise happens outside of the monsoon months, its impact on the monsoon is not as threatening. In 2019, for instance, the IMD expected less than normal rainfall in April because El Nino-like conditions were on the horizon. Paradoxically, India ended up with above normal rainfall because that heating was not as strong as expected. This year too, the IMD expects the Indian Ocean Diapole would counter the desiccating impact of the El Nino. In a year where the most concerning clouds as of now are the war-like ones over West Asia, shortage of gas and fertilizer could worsen farmer sentiment on top of the weak rains. The government should immediately begin preparations to shore up fertilizer stocks, equitable water distribution, particularly in reservoirs that are likely to be stressed, and provide timely advisories to farmers on optimal sowing practices.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- India Meteorological Department has forecast a "below normal" Southwest Monsoon (≈92% of LPA) for 2026 (±5% error margin).
- Anticipated emergence of El Niño, likely to weaken monsoon, especially in August–September.
- Possible moderating role of Indian Ocean Dipole.
- Historical pattern: IMD's early warnings of deficit monsoon often align with actual drought-like outcomes.

Key Points

- IMD Rainfall Classification
  - Normal: 96–104% of LPA
  - Below Normal: 90–96%
  - Deficient: <90%
- El Niño–Monsoon Link
  - Warming of central/eastern Pacific (>1°C).
  - ~9 out of 16 El Niño years (since 1950) associated with deficient monsoon.
  - Impact depends on timing and intensity.
- Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)
  - Positive IOD can enhance monsoon rainfall and offset El Niño effects.
- Agricultural Dependence
  - ~50% net sown area is rain-fed.
  - Monsoon contributes ~75% of annual rainfall.
- Economic Implications
  - Risk to kharif output, rural demand, and inflation.
  - Reservoir stress impacting rabi crops.
- Associated Risks
  - Fertilizer shortages due to global geopolitical tensions.
  - Increased agrarian distress if monsoon deficit persists.

Static Linkages

- Mechanism of Indian Monsoon: ITCZ, differential heating, jet streams.
- ENSO (El Niño–Southern Oscillation) and its global climatic impact.
- Cropping seasons: Kharif dependence on monsoon rainfall.
- Irrigation types and distribution in India.
- Drought types: Meteorological vs Agricultural vs Hydrological.
- Food security: buffer stocks, MSP, PDS.

Critical Analysis

- Forecasting Limitations
  - ±5% uncertainty reduces precision in planning.
- Structural Vulnerability
  - High dependence on rain-fed agriculture increases risk exposure.
- Climate Complexity
  - El Niño impact is non-linear; depends on seasonal timing.
- Sectoral Impact
  - Weak late monsoon harms crop maturation stage.
  - Potential inflationary pressures due to supply shocks.
- External Risks
  - Global disruptions (fertilizer, energy) can aggravate rural distress.

Way Forward

- Improve block-level agro-meteorological advisories (IMD + ICAR).
- Promote climate-resilient agriculture (drought-resistant seeds, diversification).
- Expand micro-irrigation & water conservation (PMKSY).
- Ensure fertilizer buffer stocks and supply chain stability.
- Strengthen reservoir management and groundwater recharge.
- Enhance coverage and efficiency of PMFBY (crop insurance).

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Devious menace

Loan apps function in a regulatory dark area and promise easy credit

In the case of Nithin Raj, the first-year dental student in Kannur who died last week after falling from atop a five-storey building, the police have identified harassment over a loan that he secured via an app as a contributing factor. His death is the third high-profile suicide linked to loan apps in Kerala within four months. Since January, over 35 complaints related to these apps have been registered in Thiruvananthapuram Rural alone. In Raj's case, parallel investigations are also probing allegations of caste-based discrimination at his college and the National Commission for Scheduled Castes has sought a report from the State police in under a week. Once installed, these apps extract contact lists, photo galleries, and GPS data from the user's device and export them to servers often located in North India or overseas. If repayment is delayed, recovery agents steadily ramp up harassment, including repeated abusive calls to the borrower, harassing persons listed as references on the loan application, and inflicting reputational damage. Kerala in particular has high smartphone penetration and digital literacy, but not necessarily financial literacy, and a large student population with urgent small-credit needs. Despite the RBI's Digital Lending Guidelines, predatory apps lend without regulated status, fabricate Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) partnerships, route funds through opaque gateways, conceal fees and disbursal deductions, and provide no grievance mechanism.

The apps are able to operate because while the RBI regulates financial entities, the harmful entity operates in the app and data layers. As a first step, smartphone makers must consider an OS-level sandbox in which any app categorised as "financial" is technically barred from accessing contacts, photos, etc., even if the user grants permission. The apps' call centres are also often traced to other States or countries, beyond the reach of local police. Second, India needs to enact legislation with prison sentences and heavy fines for illegal digital lending. When an app is removed from a store or directory, its developers relaunch immediately under new names. Third, the government can mandate all financial apps to have a cryptographically signed certificate of association from a regulated bank or NBFC and app stores to check listings against a Reserve Bank of India whitelist. This is also why the Kerala government is mulling new legislation to regulate digital lending platforms and empower local police to act against apps operating from outside the State. Fourth, the country needs rigorous disclosure standards on effective interest rates and fees, strict rules on recovery conduct, stricter KYC (Know your Customer) obligations on payment aggregators, and risk flags on UPI IDs associated with lending operations associated with a high complaint rate.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- A recent suicide case in Kerala linked to harassment by illegal digital lending apps has drawn national attention to gaps in regulation.
- Multiple similar incidents and rising complaints indicate a pattern of coercive practices by unregulated fintech platforms.
- Despite guidelines issued by the Reserve Bank of India, enforcement remains weak due to technological and jurisdictional challenges.
- The issue raises concerns relating to data privacy, cyber security, financial literacy, and protection of vulnerable groups.

Key Points

- Functioning of Predatory Apps
  - Operate without authorization or misuse NBFC tie-ups.
  - Access sensitive personal data (contacts, photos, location).
  - Use intimidation tactics—threat calls, public shaming, harassment of acquaintances.
- RBI Digital Lending Framework
  - Loans must be disbursed directly to borrower accounts.
  - Regulated entities (banks/NBFCs) are responsible for compliance.
  - Transparency in interest rates and charges is mandated.
  - However, app-level misconduct and data misuse remain inadequately regulated.
- Regulatory Challenges
  - Apps hosted on foreign servers evade Indian jurisdiction.
  - Frequent relaunch under new identities after bans.
  - Lack of coordination between financial and IT regulators.
- Socio-economic Context
  - High smartphone penetration but limited financial awareness.
  - Students and low-income individuals are primary targets.

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to life includes dignity and privacy.
- Right to Privacy (Justice K.S. Puttaswamy case, 2017).
- RBI Act, 1934 – Regulation of NBFCs.
- Information Technology Act, 2000 – Cyber offences and data misuse.
- Consumer Protection Act, 2019 – Unfair trade practices.
- Financial inclusion policies (Jan Dhan Yojana, Digital India).

Critical Analysis

- Regulatory Vacuum: RBI regulates financial entities but not digital platforms directly.
- Privacy Concerns: Excessive data access violates proportionality and consent principles.
- Weak Enforcement: Cross-border operations limit police action.
- Social Impact: Vulnerable groups face exploitation and mental distress.
- Ethical Issues: Profit-driven models overriding consumer protection norms.

Way Forward

- Introduce a comprehensive legal framework for digital lending.
- Mandatory RBI certification/whitelisting of lending apps.
- Restrict access of financial apps to sensitive personal data at OS level.
- Strengthen KYC norms for payment intermediaries.
- Ensure strict disclosure of effective interest rates and fees.
- Enhance grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Promote financial literacy among youth and vulnerable sections.
- Strengthen international cooperation to tackle cross-border cybercrime.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

In workers' protests, a test of labour reforms

FARZANA AFRIDI

THE RECENT strike by gig workers and the protest by factory workers in UP against low wages and poor working conditions underlie the operational challenges of labour reforms in the country. The four labour codes — Code on Wages, Code on Social Security, Industrial Relations Code, and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code — represent a major attempt to rationalise India's complex labour regulatory framework. Their impact on employment and wages is expected to be incremental, with outcomes that are heterogeneous across sectors, firm sizes, and worker categories. While the employment effects will be largely compositional through shifts in type and quality of employment, the productivity effects are likely to be moderately positive, depending critically on implementation quality. Against this backdrop, the policy implications become central to realising the potential gains of these reforms.

Specifically, the Code on Wages may correct wage suppression and reduce wage inequality at the lower end of the wage distribution. However, its effectiveness depends on where the national floor wage is set, relative to the current market wage. In terms of labour productivity, the codes create enabling conditions for improvement through better worker protection, reduced compliance, and more efficient labour allocation. Large firms are likely to benefit most, as they can absorb compliance costs while gaining from reduced worker turnover, improved health outcomes, and better workforce stability. In contrast, SMEs may face disproportionate compliance burdens, which can offset any labour productivity gains. Given these dynamics, the policy implications are crucial for ensuring that the labour codes translate into meaningful improvements in work conditions, wages and labour productivity.

First, strengthening enforcement mechanisms is the critical priority. A persistent challenge in India's labour market is the weak enforcement of regulations, especially in the informal sector where the majority of workers are employed. Without credible enforcement, minimum wages remain non-binding, social security provisions fail to reach intended beneficiaries, and safety regulations are not adhered to. The government must invest in digital compliance systems, including mandatory digital wage payments, electronic maintenance of employment records, and data-driven inspection systems. Targeted inspections based on risk profiling can improve efficiency while reducing opportunities for rent-seeking. Building administrative capacity at both central and state levels is essential to ensure consistent and credible enforcement.

Second, careful calibration of wage policy is necessary. The national floor wage should be set at a level that is binding yet sustainable, taking into account regional variations in cost of living and sectoral differences in productivity. Periodic revisions, ideally linked to inflation and productivity growth, can prevent the erosion of real wages while avoiding sudden shocks to employers. A poorly calibrated wage floor — either too low or too high — can undermine the objectives of the Code on Wages.

Third, there is a strong need to support small and medium enterprises, which form the backbone of India's employment structure but are also the most vulnerable to regulatory costs. Compliance subsidies, tax incentives, and simplified reporting requirements can help ease the transition to formalisation. Providing access to affordable credit and technology can further enable SMEs to improve productivity and absorb higher labour costs. Without such support, the labour codes risk having regressive effects, benefiting large firms while burdening smaller ones.

> Strengthening enforcement mechanisms is the most critical priority. A persistent challenge in India's labour market is the weak enforcement of regulations, especially in the informal sector

Fourth, expanding and deepening social security coverage is essential. Thresholds for schemes such as EPF and ESIC have eroded in real terms and exclude a large share of the workforce. They should be revised upward and indexed to inflation to maintain their relevance. Equally important is the operationalisation of provisions for gig and platform workers, including the establishment of a functional Social Security Fund, notification of contribution rates, and design of tangible benefit schemes. Bridging the coverage gap for informal workers requires proactive policy action rather than reliance on gradual formalisation. Fifth, policymakers must address threshold-based distortions that discourage firms from scaling up. Regulatory thresholds continue to create incentives for firms to stay small or fragment operations to avoid compliance. Smoother, graduated frameworks can encourage firm growth.

Sixth, labour reforms should be complemented by skill development and human capital investment. Higher wages and better working conditions must be supported by corresponding improvements in worker productivity. This requires expanding access to vocational training, strengthening industry-academia linkages, and promoting continuous skill upgrading. Seventh, there is a need for policy coordination across sectors. Labour reforms alone cannot drive employment growth unless supported by broader economic policies, including industrial policy, trade liberalisation, infrastructure development, and investment promotion. This ensures that productivity improvements translate into expanded economic activity and job creation rather than merely cost savings for firms.

Eighth, improving administrative coordination and institutional integration is vital. Moving toward a true single-window system for compliance and benefit delivery can reduce transaction costs and improve user experience. Greater coordination between central and state governments is also necessary to avoid regulatory fragmentation and ensure uniform implementation.

Finally, leveraging the digital architecture of the labour codes can create long-term gains. The development of integrated labour databases, real-time compliance monitoring systems, and publicly available data on workplace safety and employment conditions can enhance transparency, accountability, and evidence-based policymaking.

The new labour codes represent an important step toward modernising India's labour regulatory framework, with the potential to improve efficiency, formalisation, and productivity at the margins. However, their success depends not on legislative design alone but on effective enforcement, supportive policies, and institutional capacity.

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Recent strikes by gig and factory workers in Uttar Pradesh highlight concerns over low wages and poor working conditions.
- These developments bring renewed attention to the implementation challenges of India's four Labour Codes.
- The codes aim to simplify and rationalise labour laws, but their impact is uneven across sectors and worker categories.
- Concerns persist regarding weak enforcement, informal sector exclusion, and gig worker protection.

Key Points

- Four Labour Codes:
  - Code on Wages, 2019
  - Code on Social Security, 2020
  - Industrial Relations Code, 2020
  - Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020
- Employment Impact
  - Mostly compositional: shift in nature/quality of jobs rather than large job creation
  - Sector-specific and firm-size dependent
- Wages
  - National floor wage can reduce wage inequality
  - Effectiveness depends on appropriate calibration
- Productivity
  - Moderate improvement expected due to:
    - Better worker protection
    - Reduced compliance complexity
    - Improved labour allocation
- Firm-Level Impact
  - Large firms benefit more due to compliance capacity
  - MSMEs face higher compliance burden
- Key Gaps
  - Weak enforcement, especially in informal sector
  - Limited social security coverage
  - Lack of operational clarity for gig workers

Static Linkages

- Directive Principles of State Policy (Articles 38, 39, 41, 43) – welfare state, living wage
- Concept of minimum wage vs living wage (NCERT Economics)
- Informal sector dominance (~90% workforce – Economic Survey)
- Labour as a Concurrent List subject
- Role of EPFO and ESIC in social security
- Structural transformation and labour productivity

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Simplification of 29 labour laws into 4 codes
- Potential to improve ease of doing business
- Encourages formalisation of workforce
- Enhances labour mobility and productivity
- Recognises gig and platform workers

Concerns

- Weak enforcement undermines effectiveness
- Risk of wage suppression if floor wage too low
- MSMEs may face compliance stress
- Gig worker protections largely declaratory, not operational
- Threshold-based provisions may discourage firm expansion
- Informal sector largely remains outside effective coverage

Stakeholder Perspectives

- Workers: demand better wages, job security, social protection
- Employers: seek flexibility, lower compliance burden
- Government: balancing growth with welfare
- Gig platforms: concerned about cost implications

Way Forward

- Strengthen enforcement mechanisms using digital compliance systems
- Set realistic national floor wage indexed to inflation
- Provide compliance support and incentives to MSMEs
- Operationalise gig worker social security fund with clear contributions
- Remove threshold-based distortions in regulations
- Expand EPF/ESIC coverage and update eligibility thresholds
- Invest in skill development and human capital
- Improve Centre-State coordination for uniform implementation
- Build integrated labour data systems for transparency
- Align labour reforms with industrial and trade policies

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Humanity is its own greatest threat. Unless it changes tack

RAJESH GOPAL

IN GOOD faith

The Anthropocene may be remembered as the age when humans became a planetary force. It may also be remembered as the moment we were forced to choose what kind of force we wished to be

IT IS said that evolution rewards the fittest. By that measure, humanity should stand unrivalled — we can split the atom, map the genome, bend rivers, forests, and even the climate to our will. We speak of sustainability and draft treaties to protect the natural world. Yet, a troubling question lingers: Are we the first species to evolve ourselves into peril?

In ecology, populations often follow a sigmoidal curve — a slow beginning, a rapid rise, and then a plateau. Food, space, disease, competition — nature reminds every species that growth cannot be infinite. Human civilisation, it seems, followed a similar arc. From the uncertainties of the medieval world, through the surge of the Industrial Revolution, into an age of medicine, technology, and expanding life expectancy, the curve rose steeply. We celebrated this ascent. For a while, it seemed the rules no longer applied to us. But curves have a way of asserting themselves. The plateau begins quietly — climate instability, resource depletion, biodiversity loss. And now, increasingly, conflict layered upon conflict. What appears to us as separate crises may be the flattening of a curve we refused to acknowledge. In natural systems, overshoot is often followed by correction. The unsettling possibility is this: Are we witnessing the early signs of that correction?

Unlike other species, we have the ability to read the curve before it completes itself. We can choose to stabilise before collapse. Evolution gave us the capacity to understand limits. Wisdom lies in respecting them. In the natural world, survival and self-preservation are fundamental. Humans, however, seem to have acquired a peculiar trait — the ability to act against long-term self-interest, even with full awareness of the consequences. We clear forests that regulate climate, pollute rivers that sustain agriculture, and extinguish species that anchor ecosystems. In war, we accelerate this destruction. Since the end of World War II, conflicts have left ecological footprints as deep as their human toll. During the Vietnam War, ecosystems collapsed, and toxic residues linger to this day. In Eastern Europe, war has damaged wetlands critical for migratory species. In South and Southeast Asia, conflict zones fragment some of the richest biodiversity corridors. When conflicts erupt, there is no accountability for ecological collapse.

There remains a possibility, though — fragile, but real. Nature, when given space, recovers. Forests regenerate. Wildlife returns. The question is whether humanity can do the same. "Fitness" now lies not in dominance, but in restraint. This would mean recognising ecological destruction — in war or peace — as unacceptable. The Anthropocene may be remembered as the age when humans became a planetary force. It may also be remembered as the moment we were forced to choose what kind of force we wished to be. A species that consumes until it collapses, or one that understands limits and learns to endure. Whether we continue to use our power blindly — or finally, wisely — will determine not just the fate of the planet, but our own. That, perhaps, is evolution's final test.

The writer is secretary general, Global Tiger Forum

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Increasing global concern over ecological degradation due to human activities such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion.
- Scientific discourse highlights the possibility of humanity approaching ecological limits or "overshoot."
- Environmental damage caused by conflicts has emerged as a critical but under-regulated issue.
- International efforts (e.g., climate agreements, SDGs) indicate attempts to shift towards sustainable development.

Key Points

- Ecological Limits & Growth Pattern
  - Natural populations follow a logistic (sigmoidal) growth curve due to resource constraints.
  - Human civilization is showing signs of approaching ecological limits (planetary boundaries).
- Anthropocene Epoch
  - Humans have become a major geological force influencing climate, biodiversity, and ecosystems.
- Major Environmental Challenges
  - Climate change: global warming, extreme weather events (IPCC findings).
  - Biodiversity loss: rapid species extinction (IPBES estimates).
  - Resource depletion: groundwater stress, deforestation, soil degradation.
- Conflict–Environment Link
  - Armed conflicts cause long-term ecological damage (pollution, habitat destruction).
  - Lack of enforceable global mechanisms to address wartime environmental damage.
- Human Behavioral Contradiction
  - Despite awareness, unsustainable exploitation of natural resources continues.
  - Short-term economic interests dominate long-term ecological stability.
- Scope for Ecological Recovery
  - Ecosystems can regenerate if anthropogenic pressures are reduced.
  - Sustainable practices and conservation can stabilize environmental decline.

Static Linkages

- Carrying capacity and ecological balance
- Concept of sustainable development (Brundtland Report, 1987)
- Climate change basics: greenhouse effect, carbon cycle
- Biodiversity and ecosystem services
- Fundamental Duty under Article 51A(g)
- Public Trust Doctrine
- International environmental agreements (CBD, UNFCCC)

Critical Analysis

  - Positive AspectsRising global awareness about sustainability.
  - International initiatives such as SDGs and climate agreements.
  - Technological advancements in renewable energy and conservation.
  - ChallengesContinued overexploitation of resources.
  - Weak implementation of environmental regulations.
  - Absence of accountability in conflict-related ecological damage.
  - Inequitable resource consumption across countries.
  - Ethical ConcernsIntergenerational equity.
  - Conflict between development and ecological sustainability.
  - Anthropocentric vs ecocentric perspectives.

Way Forward

- Integrate ecological limits into development planning.
- Strengthen environmental governance and enforcement.
- Promote sustainable consumption and circular economy.
- Enhance climate adaptation and resilience strategies.
- Develop international legal frameworks for environmental protection during conflicts.
- Foster environmental awareness and ethical responsibility.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

US and Iran need to drop maximalist demands

IRANIAN AND American positions may have been far apart during the post-ceasefire talks in Islamabad. However, it appears that both sides are seeking a way out of the impasse. US President Donald Trump has hinted at another round of talks in the coming days, while Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has said his country is not seeking war but dialogue. Clearly, the space for diplomacy has not disappeared. But the problem is not only the trust deficit; it is also that neither side wants to appear "weak" before its domestic audience. This is evident in Trump's naval blockade, under which the US Navy is interdicting ships entering or leaving Iranian ports. Vessels calling at non-Iranian ports are allowed to proceed — assuming Iran, which has closed the Strait of Hormuz to "enemy ships", permits their passage.

The message behind the blockade is that if other nations cannot export through the strait, neither can Iran. Such a move targets Tehran's war chest — its oil exports and revenues have surged during the conflict — to force it to accept a deal. Years of harsh sanctions, however, suggest that Iran has a high tolerance for economic pain. Tehran, for its part, has warned that it will disrupt trade across the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, and the Red Sea. Each side is waiting for the other to blink first.

Finding a diplomatic solution to the three core issues — Iran's nuclear programme, the Strait of Hormuz, and the future of Tehran's regional proxies — will be difficult, but not impossible. Negotiating the 2015 nuclear deal between the US and Iran took nearly 20 months. Any agreement will require both sides to set aside maximalist demands. The exclusion of Lebanon from the ceasefire remains a sticking point, though the first direct talks in 33 years between Israel and the Lebanese government offer a measure of hope. On the nuclear programme, the US in Islamabad proposed a 20-year suspension of uranium enrichment, while Iran suggested five. On this, as on Hormuz and other issues, compromise will be essential. For diplomacy to stand a chance, both sides must maintain the ceasefire and refrain from escalating their competing blockades.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Tensions between Donald Trump (USA) and Masoud Pezeshkian (Iran) persist despite signals for renewed diplomatic engagement.
- The U.S. has imposed a naval blockade targeting Iranian oil exports, while Iran has restricted passage through the Strait of Hormuz.
- Both countries are attempting to avoid appearing weak domestically, complicating negotiations.
- Core issues include Iran's nuclear programme, maritime security in the Persian Gulf, and Iran's regional influence via proxy groups.
- Historical precedent: The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action took nearly 20 months of negotiations.

Key Points

- Strategic chokepoint: Strait of Hormuz handles ~20% of global oil trade (EIA estimates).
- Economic warfare: U.S. blockade aims to curb Iran's oil revenues ("war chest").
- Iran's resilience: Despite sanctions, Iran has shown high tolerance to economic pressure.
- Escalation risk: Iran threatens disruption across Persian Gulf, Red Sea, and Sea of Oman.
- Diplomatic constraints: Domestic political optics limit compromise.
- Negotiation gap: U.S. proposes 20-year uranium enrichment suspension vs Iran's 5-year proposal.
- Regional dimension: Israel-Lebanon tensions and proxy conflicts complicate resolution.

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz as a critical maritime chokepoint in global energy security.
- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) – framework governing nuclear activities.
- UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) – principles of freedom of navigation.
- Economic sanctions as a foreign policy tool.
- Balance of Power theory in international relations.
- Energy security and dependence on West Asian oil.

Critical Analysis

- OpportunitiesContinued diplomatic signalling indicates possibility of negotiated settlement.
  - Economic pressure may incentivise compromise.
  - ChallengesPersistent trust deficit between both nations.
  - Domestic political compulsions limit flexibility.
  - Risk of oil price shocks and inflationary pressures globally.
  - Blockades may challenge freedom of navigation under international law.
  - Proxy conflicts increase regional instability.
  - Stakeholder ConcernsIndia: energy security and diaspora safety.
  - Gulf nations: regional stability.
  - Global economy: supply chain disruptions.

Way Forward

- Revive a modified JCPOA-type framework with phased commitments.
- Implement confidence-building measures (sanctions relief vs compliance).
- Ensure adherence to UNCLOS provisions on transit passage.
- Encourage multilateral mediation (UN, EU, regional actors).
- Promote energy diversification and strategic reserves for vulnerable countries.

CIVILSWITHAKASH