DAILY NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

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CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH

Disqualify all seven defecting MPs, AAP says in petition to RS Chairman

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party on Sunday submitted a petition to Rajya Sabha Chairman C.P. Radhakrishnan seeking the disqualification of seven MPs who have quit the party and merged with the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Addressing a press conference, Sanjay Singh, leader of the AAP in the Rajya Sabha, said the move by the Raghav Chadha-led group was against the provisions of the anti-defection law.

The party urged the Chairman to terminate their membership, underlining that they were elected to the Upper House on AAP ticket but has now decided to join the BJP. On Friday, Mr. Chadha, Ashok Mittal, Sandeep Pathak, Harbhajan Singh, Rajendra Gupta, Vikram Sahni, and Swati Maliwal quit and merged with the BJP.

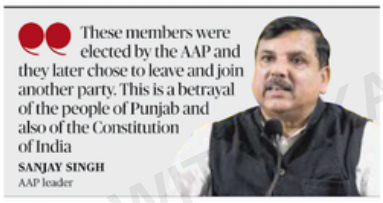
The AAP has 10 members in the Upper House.

The defecting group argues it has the required two-thirds strength to avoid disqualification. The AAP, meanwhile, has argued in its petition that the law requires the "original party" to merge and, in this case, the AAP has not taken such a call, which makes a case for their disqualification.

"After consulting constitutional experts and seeking legal opinion from Kapil Sibal [Rajya Sabha member and senior Supreme Court lawyer], I have sent a petition to the Chairman requesting that the membership of these members be terminated as per the 10th Schedule of the Constitution," he said.

He termed the move by Mr. Chadha and the others a "betrayal" of the people's mandate, and said he expected the Chairman to take an "unbiased" decision at the earliest. Six of the seven MPs who quit the party were from Punjab.

"These members were elected by the AAP and later they chose to leave and join another party. This is a betrayal of the people of Punjab and also of the Constitution," Mr. Singh said.



AAP PROTESTS 'BETRAYAL' » PAGE 2

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Aam Aadmi Party has petitioned the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, C. P. Radhakrishnan, seeking disqualification of 7 MPs.
- These MPs allegedly resigned from AAP and joined the Bharatiya Janata Party.
- The dispute revolves around interpretation of the Tenth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, especially the "merger exception".
- Defecting MPs claim protection under the two-thirds provision, while AAP argues that no merger of the original political party has taken place.

Key Points

- Anti-defection law aims to ensure stability of governments and party discipline.
- Grounds of disqualification:
  - Voluntarily giving up party membership
  - Voting/abstaining against party whip
- Exception (Merger Clause):
  - No disqualification if ≥ 2/3rd members of legislature party merge with another party
- Core issue:
  - Whether merger of legislature party alone is sufficient, or
  - Merger of original political party is also required
- Decision authority: Chairman/Speaker (quasi-judicial role)

Static Linkages

- 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985
- 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003
- Tenth Schedule – Anti-defection provisions
- Applies to Parliament and State Legislatures
- Presiding Officer as adjudicating authority
- Judicial review after decision – Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu
- Concept of "voluntarily giving up membership" (beyond formal resignation)

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Prevents political instability and opportunistic defections
- Ensures cohesion in party-based parliamentary system

Concerns

- Curtails freedom of speech and dissent of legislators
- Ambiguity in merger provision → scope for misuse and litigation
- Presiding Officer's role → risk of partisan decisions
- Delayed adjudication undermines purpose of law

Constitutional Dimension

- Balance between party discipline vs representative autonomy
- Tension between legislative privilege and judicial oversight

Way Forward

- Provide clear legal definition of "merger" (original party vs legislature party)
- Ensure time-bound adjudication of disqualification petitions
- Consider independent tribunal instead of Presiding Officer
- Restrict whip to critical votes (confidence/money bills)
- Strengthen intra-party democracy and transparency

Modi hails India's strides in nuclear, wind energy

Prime Minister says civil nuclear programme has greatly helped different sectors; highlights that the country now ranks fourth in world in wind energy capacity; calls for Census participation

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday hailed the achievement of criticality in the fast breeder nuclear reactor at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu as a "historic milestone in India's nuclear energy journey".

During his monthly *Mann ki Baat* address, the Prime Minister focused on India's nuclear and renewable energy efforts, as well as on various nature conservation initiatives being undertaken across the country.

He also urged citizens to take part in the Census 2027 enumeration process, saying the data collected were "completely secure, kept confidential, and protected with digital security".

Nuclear pride

"India's civil nuclear programme has greatly helped everyone from agriculture to modern innovators," Mr. Modi said. "Friends, just a few days ago, our nuclear scientists enhanced India's pride with another major achievement. The fast breeder reactor in Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu, has achieved criticality."

He further explained that 'criticality' is the stage in which a reactor successfully executes a self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction for the first time.

"This stage signifies the reactor entering the operational phase," Mr. Modi said.

"This is a historic milestone in India's nuclear energy journey. And importantly, this nuclear reactor is built entirely with indigenous technology."

Strides in wind energy

The Prime Minister also spoke about India's wind energy sector, saying that the country had recently achieved a major milestone with wind energy generation capacity exceeding 56 gigawatts (GW). He said that, in the past one year, about 6 GW of new capacity had been added.

"India is progressing rapidly in wind energy and the world is also looking towards us," he asserted. "Today India ranks fourth in the world in wind energy capacity. This is the hard work of our engineers, this is the diligence of our youth, this is a symbol of the collective willpower of the nation."

Mr. Modi noted that several States in India such as Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan, were leading the charge in this sector.

"In areas like Kutch, Patan, and Banaskantha in Gujarat, where previously only deserts were visible, large renewable energy parks are now being built," he said. "Youth are benefiting from this, creating new opportunities, developing new skills, and opening up new avenues for employment."

Crucial Census

Mr. Modi also spoke about the Census 2027 data collection process under way in the country, calling it the world's largest Census.

"Friends, the national Census is not just a government job," he said. "It is the responsibility of all of us. Your participation is crucial. The information you provide is completely secure, kept confidential, and protected with digital security. Let us all participate in this process. Make Census 2027 a success."

He further explained that Census 2027 had been made digital, with all information recorded directly in digital form by workers going door-to-door using a mobile app.

"This time your participation in the Census has also been made easier; you can enter your information yourself," Mr. Modi explained. "This facility will open for you 15 days before the worker's arrival. You can enter the information as per your convenience. When you complete the process, you receive a special ID . This ID will be sent to your mobile or email. Later, when the worker visits your home, you can verify the information by showing this ID."

This process, he added, eliminated the need to enter information again, thereby saving time and simplifying the process.

"In States where self-enumeration has been completed, Census staff have also begun the work of listing households," Mr. Modi said.

"So far, the house listing of approximately 12 million families has been completed," he added.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Narendra Modi announced the achievement of criticality in the Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR) at Kalpakkam, marking a major milestone in India's nuclear programme.
- The address also highlighted progress in wind energy capacity (56 GW) and advancements in digital Census 2027.

Key Points

- Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR):
  - Achieved criticality → sustained nuclear chain reaction begins.
  - Developed by Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research.
  - Uses plutonium fuel and breeds more fissile material.
  - Integral to India's second stage of nuclear programme.
- Nuclear Energy Significance:
  - Ensures energy security and supports low-carbon development.
  - Key for utilizing India's vast thorium reserves in later stages.
- Wind Energy:
  - Installed capacity exceeds 56 GW; India ranks 4th globally.
  - Key states: Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Rajasthan.
- Census 2027:
  - First fully digital census with mobile-based data collection.
  - Includes self-enumeration facility.
  - Governed under Census Act, 1948.

Static Linkages

- Three-stage nuclear programme:
  - Stage 1 – PHWR (natural uranium)
  - Stage 2 – FBR (plutonium-based)
  - Stage 3 – Thorium-based reactors
- Concept of criticality in nuclear physics.
- India's thorium reserves (largest globally).
- Atomic Energy Act, 1962.
- Renewable energy targets (500 GW non-fossil by 2030).
- Census: decadal exercise since 1881.
- Data privacy and digital governance frameworks.

Critical Analysis

Advantages:

- Strengthens long-term energy security.
- Enables efficient use of nuclear fuel via breeder technology.
- Supports India's climate commitments.
- Digital census improves efficiency and reduces duplication.

Challenges:

- Nuclear safety risks and waste management issues.
- High cost and long gestation of nuclear projects.
- Renewable energy intermittency.
- Digital census concerns:
  - Data privacy risks
  - Digital divide

Way Forward

- Accelerate thorium reactor deployment.
- Strengthen independent nuclear regulatory authority.
- Expand energy storage and grid infrastructure.
- Ensure robust data protection laws and cybersecurity.
- Increase awareness and accessibility for census participation.

‘Right to safe travel on highways part of right to life’

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The loss of life to avoidable hazards points at failure of the state’s protective umbrella, says SC

The Supreme Court has declared that the safety of commuters against road accidents and the right to safe passage on highways are part of the fundamental right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution.

“National Highways constitute approximately 2% of India’s total road length but account for nearly 30% of all road fatalities. A road, particularly a high-speed expressway, must not become a corridor of peril due to administrative lethargy or infrastructural gaps. The loss of even a single life to avoidable hazards like illegal parking or blackspots, etc., represents a failure of the state’s protective umbrella,” a Bench of Justices J.K. Maheshwari and Atul S. Chandurkar observed in an April 13 order. The court issued a series of directions, including the immediate prohibition on the construction or operation of any commercial structure within the right-of-way of any National Highway. The order also directed that vehicles should park/stop only at designated areas.

The order arose from a *suo motu* case based on the loss of a total of 34 lives in successive road accidents on November 2 and November 3 last year in Rajasthan and Telangana.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Supreme Court of India held that road safety and safe passage on highways are integral to Article 21 (Right to Life).
- The ruling came in a suo motu case following 34 deaths in consecutive road accidents in Rajasthan and Telangana (Nov 2025).
- The Bench (Justices J.K. Maheshwari & Atul S. Chandurkar) emphasized state accountability for preventable road hazards.
- Directions issued include:
  - Ban on commercial establishments within National Highway right-of-way (ROW).
  - Vehicles to park/stop only in designated zones.

Key Points

- Article 21 expanded: Includes safe mobility and accident-free travel.
- Disproportionate fatalities:
  - National Highways = ~2% of total road length
  - Account for ~30% of road fatalities (MoRTH data)
- Court flagged issues:
  - Illegal parking
  - Highway encroachments
  - Black spots (accident-prone zones)
- Reinforced state’s duty of care under constitutional governance.
- Aligns with India’s commitment under:
  - Brasilia Declaration on Road Safety (2015)
- Supports existing initiatives:
  - Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019
  - National Road Safety Policy

Static Linkages

- Article 21 interpreted expansively in:
  - Maneka Gandhi vs Union of India – due process and dignity
  - M.C. Mehta vs Union of India – right to a safe environment
- Directive Principles:
  - Article 38 – Promote welfare of people
  - Article 47 – Duty of state to improve public health
- Road safety governance:
  - National Highways Act, 1956
  - Motor Vehicles Act, 1988
- 2nd ARC Report: Emphasizes citizen-centric governance & accountability

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Recognizes road safety as a constitutional guarantee.
- Strengthens state liability and accountability.
- Can drive systemic reforms in highway management.
- Aligns with global road safety commitments.

Challenges

- Implementation deficit at state/local levels.
- Weak enforcement of traffic and safety norms.
- Encroachment removal vs livelihood concerns.
- Poor road design and lack of support infrastructure (parking zones, lay-bys).

Way Forward

- Scientific identification and elimination of blackspots.
- Strengthen enforcement using technology (ITS, AI monitoring).
- Develop dedicated parking and rest areas along highways.
- Institutional strengthening of road safety bodies.
- Improve Centre–State coordination.
- Promote road safety awareness and behavioural change.

Trump's hubris and the cost to the world order

M.K. Narayanan
Former Director, Intelligence Bureau, a former National Security Adviser, and a former Governor of West Bengal

The West Asia conflict has exposed the disruptive leadership style of the United States President

The *Chambers Dictionary* describes hubris as insolence, arrogance, and overconfidence that can lead to disaster or ruin. The moot question is whether this description fits the actions and personality of United States President Donald Trump. To many, if not most people, it would seem an apt description of the 47th President of the U.S. who, in his second term, seems intent on completing the unfinished tasks of his first, and in a manner that leaves no one in any doubt about his narcissistic attributes. To some, this may appear too harsh a judgment, but considering reactions from across the globe, the majority would agree.

Mr. Trump's actions at the beginning of this year in Venezuela, followed by his shenanigans in West Asia, suggest that he fully comprehends what he is doing. His supporters even cite historical precedents to justify his actions. They refuse to accept that all this only confirms the rise of the 'illiberal international', which is reshaping the global order today.

A false reading of victory

Wars usually tend to be fought in the belief that one side will come out victorious. In West Asia today, the situation conforms to the adage that not all wars need to have a winner. A 'no win fragile peace' in West Asia should ordinarily be a humbling experience for anyone, but Mr. Trump is intent on brandishing the claim that he has virtually eclipsed Iran. Higher levels of bombast cannot, however, obscure the reality that while Iran has suffered, it still stands tall though bruised. The Pakistan moderated truce talks in Islamabad have, meanwhile, provided a fig leaf for a truce of sorts and an opportunity to continue negotiations without either side having to prove its claims of victory.

Mr. Trump's folly of launching a war on a Friday/Saturday, hoping to force a result in his favour by Monday morning, has since been proven wrong. Spurned, perhaps, by his success in Venezuela, and driven by a delusion to win a Nobel Peace Prize by preventing another world war, Mr. Trump appears to see victory in every twist and turn of events in West Asia today. His occasional claims to peace having returned to the region appear increasingly hallucinating rather than real.

From Israel's point of view, a ceasefire on terms that have not achieved its objective of destroying Iran's war machine carries little meaning. That this should be so, even after the U.S. had joined the war on its side, would be even more hurtful, but it has little option but to go along. A major worry is that if the impression were to gain ground that, having launched a war to end all wars, it has now been reduced to being a nursemaid to a faltering peace, it would be highly damaging to its image and future.

As of now, there appear to be no victors or losers in a conflict 'manufactured' by Israel, and sustained by the U.S. If anything, suspicions have grown about Israel's role overall, as also about its manipulative skills, leading to a 'credibility gap' across the region. The role of the U.S. as a guarantor and guardian of many Arab States, including provision of a nuclear umbrella, also stands diminished. It is too early to assess how this would fundamentally alter power equations across the region.

Military leaders often declare deadlines to finish campaigns. Mr. Trump is, perhaps, the first civilian overlord to announce deadlines and determine victories, often randomly and without justification. This war has witnessed a series of announcements by Mr. Trump about the end of the war in West Asia as also several announcements of victory, leading to an 'Alice in Wonderland' scenario. Meanwhile, hundreds have lost their lives on account of an unnecessary conflict, and several thousand have been rendered homeless.

Modern war realities

One lesson to learn from the conflict – something that is less known and often overlooked – is how smaller armies can 'best' major powers by employing low cost effective weapons and tactics. Further, overestimating the strength of powerful allies – by Israel in respect of the U.S. – could prove a costly mistake. Iran might have been battered, but any belief that this would result in the dismantling of Iran's network of proxy militia, has clearly been belied. What has accompanied this is the deep suspicion – across the region, and also in the West and elsewhere – about Israel's Machiavellian tactics and policies of misinformation.

The failure of the Pakistan-mediated ceasefire talks held from early April in Islamabad raised the spectre of a fresh round of unbridled violence, with the U.S. President at one stage even threatening to erase Iran from the face of the earth. Yet, even as all bets were off on what to expect at the end of the two-week-long ceasefire, Mr. Trump pulled another rabbit out of his hat. As the world waited with concern at the grim prospect of a further escalation of a needless war, Mr. Trump announced that he was acceding to Pakistan's request and announced an indefinite extension of the ceasefire.

Mr. Trump's logic in acquiescing to Pakistan's request and endorsing the need to give Tehran's leadership more time to prepare a proper end to the war would have been praiseworthy, had it not emanated from anyone other than the present incumbent of the White House, who is known for his mood swings. Notwithstanding the rickety ceasefire prospects, hopes have arisen that an all-out war has been avoided for now. Iran, however, is acting as a 'spoiler', seizing some ships in the Strait of Hormuz. There is also no clarity on the date or even the likelihood of the next round of U.S.-Iran talks.

The ceasefire does provide some breathing space for now. What is significant is the fact that a war initiated by Israel has since changed colour, with Israel's role becoming peripheral. The focus has shifted to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and on determining who has the authority to impose a blockade of international waters. In 1507, a Portuguese admiral took control over the Strait of Hormuz, turning it into a customs-controlled port that levied duties on passing trade. Mr. Trump is now exploiting this anachronism to turn it into a global chokepoint, imposing a naval blockade, and threatening the free flow of oil across the Strait. Given the unpredictability of his thought processes, nothing can be said as to how long the latest ceasefire would last, but his assertion that Tehran must never have a nuclear weapon, nor make or obtain one, would seem to suggest that the current ceasefire is likely at best to be a temporary one.

Pakistan's role

What is possibly most galling for India is the emergence of Pakistan as a conciliator – or to use Mr. Trump's phrase "an indispensable broker" as far as the conflict is concerned. Even as Mr. Trump seeks to garner all the glory, proclaiming that he has been able to stave-off the 10th major war of his times, Pakistan's role and its influence is witnessing an upswing. The turn of the wheel whereby Pakistan rather than India helped negotiate peace, is likely to make India unhappy, but this is the reality as of today. The special relationship between Field Marshal Asim Munir of Pakistan and the U.S. President is different from the usual corying up of Pakistani generals with U.S. Presidents in the past, and this has helped shape Pakistan's emergence as a peacemaker that cannot be wished away. What should also not be lost sight of is that, of late, Pakistan has successfully managed to project itself as a net 'security guarantor' for the Islamic world. In the circumstances, India must tread lightly. It may be something that India had not bargained for, but any attempt at this time to denigrate Pakistan and Asim Munir's role could prove counterproductive. Patience has been India's sublime virtue, and this is the time for India to exercise it in full measure.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The recent escalation in West Asia involving Donald Trump's strategic interventions and ceasefire diplomacy has reshaped regional dynamics.
- Conflict involving Israel–Iran tensions, U.S. military involvement, and Pakistan-mediated ceasefire negotiations has led to a fragile peace.
- The situation highlights shifting global power equations, including:
  - Declining credibility of traditional security guarantors (U.S.)
  - Emergence of new diplomatic actors like Pakistan
- Strategic concerns such as the Strait of Hormuz blockade threats and oil security have gained prominence.

Key Points

- Fragile Ceasefire:
  - Ceasefire brokered with Pakistan's mediation; lacks clear victory for any side.
  - Iran remains militarily intact despite damage.
- U.S. Strategy:
  - Aggressive, deadline-driven military interventions.
  - Claims of "victory" despite inconclusive outcomes.
- Israel's Position:
  - Failed to fully neutralize Iran's military capabilities.
  - Increasing regional distrust due to perceived misinformation tactics.
- Iran's Response:
  - Retains influence via proxy networks.
  - Actions like seizure of ships in Strait of Hormuz escalate tensions.
- Geopolitical Shifts:
  - Pakistan emerging as a key diplomatic broker.
  - U.S. credibility as a global stabilizer weakening.
- Strategic Flashpoint:
  - Strait of Hormuz as a global chokepoint (~20% of global oil trade).

Static Linkages

- Balance of power theory in international relations
- Concept of geopolitical chokepoints in global trade
- Role of proxy warfare in modern conflicts
- Principles of freedom of navigation under international law (UNCLOS)
- Energy security and strategic reserves

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Prevention of full-scale war in a sensitive region
- Demonstrates role of emerging mediators in global diplomacy

Negatives

- Absence of decisive resolution leading to continued instability
- Weakening of U.S.-led global security architecture
- Increased risks from proxy actors and maritime disruptions

Challenges

- Ensuring durability of the ceasefire
- Managing misinformation and strategic narratives
- Safeguarding international trade routes and energy flows

Implications for India

- Vulnerability of energy imports due to Hormuz tensions
- Strategic concern over Pakistan's rising diplomatic influence
- Need for calibrated and balanced foreign policy

Way Forward

- Strengthen multilateral diplomacy and conflict-resolution mechanisms
- Ensure maritime security and uphold freedom of navigation
- Diversify energy import sources and enhance strategic reserves
- Promote regional dialogue and confidence-building measures
- Maintain strategic autonomy in foreign policy engagements

Summer as a source of income shock for gig workers

Krishna Malakar
Assistant Professor in Climate Policy, IIT Madras

As India moves into another summer, early forecasts indicate intense heat ahead. Heatwaves are no longer rare; they are a recurring feature of Indian summers. The question is no longer whether extreme heat will return, but whether the country is prepared for its economic consequences.

Official data show that India did experience significant heat-related mortality in 2022. Meteorological trends indicate that heatwaves across large parts of the country have become more frequent and prolonged over the past decade. As policymakers review preparedness measures before peak summer arrives, there is one group which remains largely absent from the adaptation conversation – gig and delivery workers, whose livelihoods increasingly power India's urban economy.

From food delivery riders and e-commerce couriers to app-based drivers and logistics workers, millions now earn income through digital platforms. NITI Aayog estimates India had about 7.7 million gig workers in 2020-21, projected to reach over 23 million by 2029-30. As heatwaves intensify, this growing workforce will be among the most climate-exposed and least protected.

Heat cuts earnings

For gig and delivery workers, extreme heat is not just a matter of discomfort; it directly affects earnings. Income depends on the number of trips completed, orders delivered, or hours logged on an app. When temperatures surge, movement slows, fatigue increases, and health risks rise; yet, incentive structures remain unchanged.

Unlike salaried employees, gig workers cannot "work from home" or take paid leave during extreme heat. Logging off for a few hours means immediate income loss. Continuing to work through peak heat hours increases the risk of dehydration, heat exhaustion, and longer-term health stress. If the coming summer follows recent patterns, heat will be not just a public health concern but an income shock, forcing workers to choose between protecting their health and their earnings.

Preparedness remains incomplete

India has made progress in recognising heat as a public health risk. Heat Action Plans, early warning systems and emergency measures have improved preparedness in several cities. But most policies still treat heat as a medical emergency rather than an economic risk, assuming that people can adjust their behaviour. Advisories typically recommend staying indoors, reducing physical activity, and taking frequent breaks. But for gig and delivery workers, whose income depends on mobility, these options are not realistic.

Even where cities set up temporary drinking water kiosks, shaded rest areas, or cooling centres, these measures are rarely designed with highly mobile platform workers in mind. As a result, preparedness efforts may reduce mortality, but they do little to prevent income loss.

The weeks before peak summer offer a narrow but important policy window. Heat stress sits at the intersection of climate policy, labour regulation, urban planning and platform governance. Yet, responsibility remains fragmented.

Health departments focus on illness and mortality. Disaster management agencies focus on emergency response. Labour departments grapple with the ambiguous employment status of gig workers. Digital platforms optimise delivery times and incentives, with limited explicit integration of climate risk considerations. When accountability is distributed across institutions without coordination, heat risk for gig workers remains inadequately addressed. These vulnerabilities are further compounded for women gig workers, who often face additional health, safety and unpaid care burdens during extreme heat, making income disruption even harder to absorb.

If adaptation is to move beyond reactive measures, this is the moment to expand its scope.

First, heat must be treated as a labour and productivity issue, not only a health one. Rest norms during peak heat hours, shaded congregation points, and access to drinking water at common waiting locations should be seen as basic safeguards.

Second, policymakers must acknowledge that extreme heat creates income volatility. Without mechanisms – whether through labour protections or better integration with existing welfare systems – to cushion these losses, adaptation will remain incomplete.

Third, digital labour platforms need to be part of the preparedness conversation. Heat-responsive design such as moderating delivery pressure during peak heat hours or introducing more flexible performance metrics – can lower exposure without halting services.

Finally, stronger institutional coordination is needed before summer intensifies. Collaboration among labour departments, urban local bodies, disaster management authorities, and platform regulators would signal that heat risk is being treated as an economic issue, not just a seasonal emergency.

Rethinking resilience

India's cities increasingly depend on gig and delivery workers to function. Food, medicines and essential goods move through urban systems because this workforce absorbs daily risks. As temperatures rise, those risks will intensify.

Climate resilience cannot be measured only by advisories issued or cooling centres opened. For gig workers navigating city streets on two wheelers and bicycles, resilience means the ability to work safely – and to earn without enduring silent income losses during extreme heat.

If heat preparedness continues to overlook gig and delivery workers, the country will enter another season of rising temperatures without protecting one of its most visible and essential workforces.

Resilience for gig workers means safe work and stable earnings during extreme heat

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- India is witnessing early onset and increasing frequency of heatwaves, indicating a long-term climatic shift.
- Heatwaves are no longer episodic but recurring extreme weather events affecting large regions.
- India's gig workforce (≈7.7 million in 2020-21; projected ≈23 million by 2029-30 – NITI Aayog) is highly exposed to heat stress.
- Existing policy frameworks largely address mortality and health, while economic vulnerability remains under-addressed.

Key Points

- Heatwaves lead to:
  - Reduced productivity and working hours
  - Increased risk of heat-related illnesses
  - Immediate income loss for daily-wage and gig workers
- Gig workers:
  - Depend on output-based earnings (per trip/task)
  - Lack paid leave and income security
  - Cannot avoid peak heat exposure due to nature of work
- Heat Action Plans (HAPs):
  - Focus on early warning systems and emergency response
  - Limited inclusion of informal/mobile workforce needs
- Institutional gaps:
  - Fragmented roles across health, labour, and disaster management authorities
  - Lack of coordination with digital labour platforms
- Gender dimension:
  - Women gig workers face higher vulnerability due to dual burden (work + care responsibilities)

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to life (includes health and safe working conditions)
- Article 39(e) – Protection of workers' health
- Directive Principles – Welfare orientation of state
- Disaster Management Act, 2005 – NDMA guidelines on heatwaves
- Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020
- Informal sector vulnerability (Economic Survey)
- Climate change and extreme weather events (NCERT Geography)

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Recognition of heatwaves as a policy and disaster management issue
- Implementation of Heat Action Plans and early warning systems
- Growing attention to climate adaptation strategies

Challenges

- Heatwaves viewed primarily as a health issue, ignoring economic impacts
- Gig workers excluded from formal labour protection frameworks
- Absence of income protection or compensation mechanisms
- Inadequate urban infrastructure (shade, water, cooling spaces)
- Platform-based work models prioritize efficiency over worker safety
- Institutional fragmentation reduces effectiveness of response
- Gender disparities intensify vulnerability

Way Forward

- Recognize heatwaves as a labour productivity and economic issue
- Introduce heat-sensitive labour regulations (rest breaks, flexible hours)
- Develop worker-centric urban infrastructure (cooling centres, hydration points)
- Integrate gig workers into social security frameworks (e-Shram, insurance)
- Ensure platform accountability (heat-adjusted incentives, reduced workload)
- Strengthen coordination among government agencies
- Promote climate-resilient urban planning
- Address gender-specific vulnerabilities in policy design

Turning point

The U.S. is slicing away at India's ability to pursue an independent foreign policy

The U.S. has allowed its waiver of sanctions on Iran's Chabahar port to lapse on Sunday (April 26), indicating that India is now at a crossroads on how to proceed with the port as a key connectivity initiative. Barring a belated waiver renewal, New Delhi must choose between accepting sanctions and abandoning its $620 million investment, or proceeding with the project and risk strict U.S. sanctions. India's "start-stop" engagement with Iran on developing a facility at the Shahid Beheshti terminal at Chabahar goes back decades, and Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee signed an MoU for the project in 2003. However, U.S. pressure on India to postpone plans aimed at stopping Iran's nuclear programme led to construction delays. The Manmohan Singh government was unable to make much progress either, but continued work on the Zaranj-Delaram highway to connect the Iran-Afghanistan border crossing to Kabul. After the 2015 JCPOA, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government signed a trilateral agreement with Iran and Afghanistan to advance trade and aid via Chabahar port and a highway into Afghanistan. Chabahar's importance grew as ties with Pakistan deteriorated and it restricted India's transit access to Afghanistan. However, fate intervened again as U.S. President Donald Trump walked out of the JCPOA, and began a "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran by re-implementing all sanctions. While India was forced by the U.S. to give up Iranian oil imports, and plans for the rail line, the U.S. built a "carve-out" for Chabahar, allowing India to send wheat and medical supplies to Afghanistan. That carve-out is now at an end, with the Trump administration giving Delhi until this month to "wind-down" its operations. Since November 2025, India has withdrawn personnel from Chabahar, prepaid its $120 million investment commitment, and is considering transferring its stake in the Shahid Beheshti Terminal to an Iranian company, with the option of returning later.

The West Asia war has complicated the situation, and it is unclear when, if ever, India will be able to re-engage with Iran or rebuild Chabahar after the conflict. Temporarily dropping the project may seem pragmatic. However, Chabahar is just one of several India's independent decisions that the U.S. has thwarted; there have been diktats to stop buying oil from Iran, Venezuela, and Russia. Mr. Trump has threatened sanctions on all trade with Iran, and on BRICS grouping members; the U.S.'s seemingly insatiable demands may also extend to India's engagement with other countries. Giving in on Chabahar will not just end India's connectivity plans with Iran, Central Asia and Afghanistan. It will damage its claims of sovereign autonomy, and slice away its ability to pursue an independent foreign policy.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The United States has allowed the sanctions waiver on Iran's Chabahar Port to lapse (April 2026).
- India faces a strategic choice between:
  - Continuing the project and risking U.S. sanctions, or
  - Withdrawing and losing a key connectivity asset.
- India has invested about $620 million in the Shahid Beheshti Terminal.
- Project origins trace back to 2003 (MoU under Atal Bihari Vajpayee).
- Momentum increased after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with a 2016 India–Iran–Afghanistan trilateral agreement.
- Earlier, the U.S. allowed a limited waiver for humanitarian aid to Afghanistan via Chabahar.
- India has recently reduced operational presence and prepaid commitments, indicating uncertainty.

Key Points

- Location: Southeastern Iran, on the Gulf of Oman.
- Strategic Role:
  - Bypasses Pakistan to access Afghanistan and Central Asia.
  - Counters China's presence at Gwadar Port (Pakistan).
- Connectivity Link: Part of International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).
- Economic Significance: Facilitates trade in energy, minerals, and goods.
- Geopolitical Issue:
  - U.S. sanctions on Iran (nuclear issue).
  - India balancing ties with U.S. and Iran.
- Recent Development: End of waiver → increased risk for Indian investment.

Static Linkages

- Strategic autonomy as a principle of India's foreign policy.
- Economic sanctions as a tool in international relations.
- Importance of sea routes and ports in trade and geopolitics.
- Connectivity corridors as instruments of regional integration.
- Energy security and diversification of trade routes.

Critical Analysis

Significance for India

- Strategic access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- Reduces dependence on Pakistan routes.
- Strengthens India's regional influence.

Concerns

- Risk of U.S. secondary sanctions (banking, trade).
- Project delays due to geopolitical uncertainty.
- Financial and operational risks in Iran.

Key Issue

- Balancing strategic autonomy vs strategic partnerships (especially with U.S.).

Way Forward

- Pursue balanced diplomacy with U.S. and Iran.
- Seek waiver through negotiations.
- Strengthen INSTC and alternative corridors.
- Use local currency trade mechanisms to bypass sanctions.
- Diversify connectivity and reduce overdependence on a single route.

Tough call

India needs to develop rapid venom detection diagnostics

A combination of snakes being ectothermic, a hotter summer than usual, difficult decision-making, and gaps in clinical infrastructure has led to a situation in Kerala where the availability of anti-snake venom (ASV) has not been able to prevent all deaths from snakebites. Snakes are driven by the heat to seek refuge in cool, damp spaces, which means homes and storerooms with firewood and coconut husks. The State is also densely vegetated with substantial human-wildlife range overlap. April-May is also the pre-monsoon breeding season for many venomous snakes, which means that they move around more and tend to be defensive. However, about 70% of snakebite presentations involve non-venomous species, and roughly half of the rest are dry bites with no venom injected. A substantial number of patients thus do not warrant ASV. Caution against administering ASV willy-nilly is merited because these compounds can also induce anaphylactic reactions, which can be fatal. At the same time, there is no commercially available diagnostic kit in India to detect venom in a patient's blood, and the diagnosis is entirely symptomatic. The ICMR has called this syndromic approach a systemic flaw, since by the time symptoms appear, the venom may already have damaged tissue irreversibly. Together with scarce ICU beds, a lack of ventilator backups, inadequate training in managing anaphylaxis, and limited lab support for monitoring, this approach has offset the benefits of the availability of ASV.

India accounts for nearly half of all snakebites in the world, with agricultural workers and children being the worst affected. Kerala is home to over 100 snake species, including the Big Four venomous snakes: the common krait, Russell's viper, saw-scaled viper, and spectacled cobra. The State government has made snakebite a notifiable disease. It launched the 'SARPA' programme to professionalise snake rescue. The SARPA Padam and the upcoming SARPA Suraksha programmes also focus on assessing risk and conducting ward-level and school awareness campaigns. Progressive as the notification and 'SARPA' are relative to similar measures in the rest of India, the deaths are a sign that Kerala may be prevention-heavy and that it needs to reinforce the 'cure' as well. ASV is already widely available; the uncertainty that prevails over doctors' decision-making at the first point of contact needs to be mitigated. Many experts have also called for the development and use of rapid venom detection diagnostics to eliminate the risks of the syndromic approach. This must be followed by increasing hospital capacity and the availability of skilled medical workers to manage the consequences of that decision.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Kerala continues to report snakebite deaths despite adequate availability of anti-snake venom (ASV).
- Ecological factors (heatwaves, breeding season) and systemic healthcare gaps reduce treatment effectiveness.
- Indian Council of Medical Research has flagged the syndromic (symptom-based) diagnosis approach as a major limitation.
- Kerala has introduced measures like notifying snakebite as a disease and launching the 'SARPA' programme.

Key Points

- India contributes ~50% of global snakebite deaths (WHO).
- Kerala has >100 snake species including the "Big Four" (cobra, krait, Russell's viper, saw-scaled viper).
- ~70% snakebites are non-venomous; ~50% of venomous bites are "dry bites".
- ASV can cause anaphylaxis, making indiscriminate use risky.
- No rapid venom detection kits → treatment based on symptoms.
- Gaps: ICU shortage, lack of ventilators, inadequate training in managing complications.
- Government initiatives:
  - Snakebite made a notifiable disease
  - 'SARPA' programme for rescue, awareness, and risk mapping

Static Linkages

- Reptiles are ectothermic → behavior influenced by ambient temperature.
- Human-wildlife conflict increases with habitat overlap.
- Anaphylaxis = acute allergic reaction (immune response).
- Primary healthcare is critical for emergency response in rural areas.
- Disease notification improves epidemiological surveillance.

Critical Analysis

Strengths

- Kerala's proactive surveillance (notification).
- Preventive initiatives like SARPA and awareness campaigns.
- Relatively better ASV availability.

Weaknesses

- Absence of diagnostic tools → delayed/incorrect treatment.
- Overuse vs underuse dilemma of ASV.
- Weak critical care infrastructure.
- Limited trained personnel in toxicology and emergency care.

Way Forward

- Develop rapid venom detection kits.
- Strengthen primary healthcare + emergency response systems.
- Improve ICU and ventilator availability.
- Standardize ASV administration protocols.
- Capacity building for anaphylaxis management.
- Integrate snakebite management into National Health Mission.
- Use data-driven risk mapping for targeted interventions.

Why below-average rains don't rule out flood threat

The new monsoon worry is the number of extreme rainfall events. Rainfall has been happening in shorter and more intense spells

AMITABH SINHA

THE INDIA Meteorological Department (IMD) has said the country will receive only 92% of normal rainfall this monsoon. However, this forecast does not capture the intra-seasonal and regional variations in rainfall, a standard feature of the Indian monsoon.

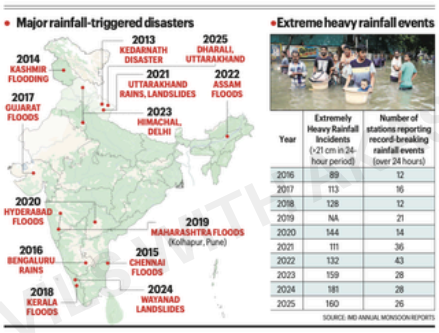
The below-normal rainfall forecast, for example, is no indicator of the number of extreme rainfall events likely to occur this coming season. Such events have been steadily increasing over the last decade or two, and have routinely turned into, or triggered, large-scale disasters. Several studies have linked the increasing trend of such incidents in recent years to climate change.

In the past decade or so, starting with the Kedarnath tragedy in 2013, India has seen at least one major rainfall-related disaster every year. In some years, like 2023, there have been multiple such incidents. The overall extent of monsoon rainfall over the country as a whole has had no bearing on the frequency or severity of extreme rainfall events. Such disaster-inducing rainfall incidents have happened even in the years when the overall rainfall during the season was relatively low, like in 2015, 2018 or 2023.

Climate impact

IMD classifies any rainfall above 21 cm in a 24-hour period as extremely heavy rain. Typically, such events account for less than 0.1% of all recorded rainfall events in the country. But their number seems to be increasing. In the four-year period between 2008 and 2011, for example, the maximum number of extremely heavy rainfall events in any season was 64 (in 2008), according to IMD's Annual Monsoon Reports. This number has been consistently above 100 every year since 2017. In 2024, as many as 181 extreme rainfall events were recorded, while last year this number was 160.

Part of this rise in the numbers can be attributed to a lowering of the threshold for a rainfall incident to qualify as extremely heavy. Before 2016, only rainfall above 244.5 mm in a 24-hour period was classified as extremely heavy. This was lowered to 204.5 mm (sometimes rounded off as 21 cm) in 2016. But the increasing trend of such incidents is evident even at the higher threshold level.



Extreme heavy rainfall events

Year	Extremely Heavy Rainfall Incidents (>21 cm in 24-hour period)	Number of stations reporting record-breaking rainfall events (over 24 hours)
2016	89	12
2017	113	16
2018	128	12
2019	NA	21
2020	144	14
2021	111	36
2022	132	43
2023	159	28
2024	181	28
2025	160	26

SOURCE: IMD ANNUAL MONSOON REPORTS

A disaster a year

For more than a decade now, India has seen at least one major rainfall-induced disaster during the monsoon. Some of these, like the Jammu and Kashmir flooding of 2014, the Chennai urban flooding of 2015 and the Kerala floods of 2018, have been record-breaking, once-in-a-century, or once-in-50-years kind of events.

Almost every major city in the country — Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kochi, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Srinagar, Chandigarh, Gurgaon, Lucknow, Guwahati, Kolkata — has seen at least one major flooding event in the last 10 years, many classified as disasters. Cities like Chennai, Bengaluru, and Mumbai have witnessed multiple such events during this time.

Part of the blame for this urban flooding can, of course, be put on poor urban planning, unregulated development, construction on flood-plains, water bodies, or water channels, and municipal apathy. But it is also true that many of these disaster situations were triggered by unprecedented rainfall events.

In the first week of September of 2014, for example, Jammu and Kashmir received record-breaking rainfall. The overall rainfall for the month of September turned out to be the highest in over 100 years. The resultant floods, possibly the worst ever in the last one century, killed over 280 people, damaged more than 2.5 lakh houses, and destroyed around 6.5 lakh hectares of crop area according to official estimates.

Similarly, the 2018 Kerala flooding in August was triggered by exceptionally high rainfall, the maximum since 1931, according to IMD records. Bengaluru has seen its 24-hour highest rainfall record broken twice in the last 10 years.

Difficult to predict

Such extraordinarily high rainfall is extremely difficult to predict. In many such cases, the IMD can see the chances of very heavy rainfall and issues appropriate alerts, but whether the eventual rainfall would be in the range of 250 mm or 500 mm cannot be said with any reasonable degree of certainty. This is an inherent limitation of weather science. Weather is an extremely chaotic system, with very small changes in initial conditions giving rise to big differences in the end result.

A denser observational network, better modelling, and an increase in computational capabilities can help improve the forecast, but eliminating uncertainty altogether is not possible. The more granular the forecast, in time as well as in location, the greater is the uncertainty.

It is fairly established now that climate change is further exacerbating this uncertainty. Under the influence of climate change, extreme weather events have become more frequent and more intense, posing a much bigger challenge to meteorologists.

This trend is being seen globally, not just in India. And it is not restricted to rainfall events. Other weather events, like drought or heat waves, have also been showing a similar trend.

Managing rain-induced disasters

Until a few years ago, the possibility of rainfall deficiency was the biggest concern of policymakers during the monsoon season. That is because the potential of drought had serious implications for food security, rural incomes, and overall economy. Over the years, India has become more resilient to rainfall deficiencies and has been able to minimise their impact.

But excessive, localised rainfall, particularly in large, densely populated, urban agglomerations, has emerged as the new headache during the monsoon, and needs urgent attention. Since the Chennai floods of 2015, a variety of agencies have been working together to reduce the risks of urban flooding in major cities, but the results are yet to be seen. To a large extent, it is an urban planning and municipal governance issue. But its impact is big.

Floods in general, not just urban flooding, killed nearly 17,500 people in the 10-year period between 2012 and 2021, according to a government statement in response to a question in Rajya Sabha in 2023. The report of the Sixteenth Finance Commission pointed out that floods accounted for over 55% of all expenditure on disasters by states between 2019-20 and 2023-24.

Besides, disruption in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, or Chennai has very large economic consequences, apart from the direct toll on life and property.

Rising trend

Starting with the Kedarnath tragedy in 2013, India has seen at least one major rainfall-related disaster every year

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The overall extent of monsoon rain has had no bearing on the frequency or severity of extreme rainfall events

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- India Meteorological Department forecasted 92% of Long Period Average (LPA) rainfall for the upcoming monsoon (below normal).
- Despite this, intra-seasonal and regional variability remains high.
- Rising trend of extreme rainfall events (≥ 204.5 mm in 24 hours).
- Increasing frequency of rainfall-induced disasters since the 2013 Kedarnath tragedy.
- Linkages established between climate change and intensification of extreme weather events.

Key Points

- Decoupling of total rainfall and disasters
  - Below-normal monsoon years (e.g., 2015, 2018, 2023) still witnessed severe floods.
- Rising Extreme Rainfall Events
  - Pre-2010: ~60 events/year
  - Post-2017: consistently 100+ events/year
  - 2024: 181 events, 2023: 160 events
- Definition Change
  - Pre-2016: ≥ 244.5 mm/day
  - Post-2016: ≥ 204.5 mm/day
  - Trend remains rising even with old threshold.
- Increasing Intensity
  - Rainfall occurring in shorter, intense bursts → higher flood risk.
- Major Disasters
  - 2014 Jammu and Kashmir floods – record rainfall in 100 years
  - 2015 Chennai floods – urban flooding crisis
  - 2018 Kerala floods – highest rainfall since 1931
- Urban Flooding
  - Cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai repeatedly affected.
  - Causes: poor drainage, encroachment, unplanned urbanisation.
- Prediction Challenges
  - Weather systems are chaotic → high uncertainty.
  - Difficult to predict exact intensity (e.g., 250 mm vs 500 mm rainfall).
- Economic & Human Impact
  - ~17,500 deaths (2012–2021) due to floods (Govt data).
  - Floods accounted for 55% of disaster expenditure (Finance Commission data).

Static Linkages

- Monsoon mechanism depends on land-sea thermal contrast and ITCZ shift.
- Orographic rainfall along Western Ghats and Himalayas enhances extremes.
- Urban Heat Island effect intensifies convection and rainfall.
- Drainage basin characteristics influence flood severity.
- Disaster Management Act, 2005 provides institutional framework.
- Role of NDMA guidelines on urban flooding (2010).
- Climate change → increased atmospheric moisture (Clausius-Clapeyron relation).
- ENSO (El Niño/La Niña) affects monsoon variability.

Critical Analysis

Issues

- Focus on aggregate rainfall, not extremes
- Weak urban planning and governance
- Lack of real-time local preparedness
- Increasing climate uncertainty

Implications

- High economic losses in urban centres
- Threat to lives, infrastructure, and agriculture
- Rising fiscal burden on states

Way Forward

- Shift focus → extreme event forecasting
- Develop hyper-local weather prediction systems
- Implement sponge city & nature-based solutions
- Protect wetlands, lakes, drainage channels
- Strengthen urban governance and planning laws
- Integrate climate resilience in infrastructure
- Improve early warning dissemination
- Promote community-level disaster preparedness

For true nari shakti, take jobs where women workers are

FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

ASHOK GULATI, AYUSHI GUPTA AND BIDISHA CHANDA

THE NARI Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam 2026 could not get through Parliament primarily because it was clubbed with the delimitation exercise. This is despite the earlier passage of the Women's Reservation Act of 2023, which reserves 33 per cent of seats in the Lok Sabha for women. The current reality is that in Parliament and most state assemblies, the proportion of women is not even half of the 33 per cent reservation being talked about. This raises a question: Is reservation the only way to empower women? While it may be desirable, we don't think that it can result in true empowerment.

To truly empower women, give them quality education, develop their skills for suitable jobs, and incentivise women's employment in the formal sector. Only then will their participation in the workforce increase in a meaningful way.

Unfortunately, India's female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) in 2025 stood at just 40 per cent, as per PLFS data from MOSPI, although ILO (2025) puts this figure at 32.4 per cent, against 68.6 per cent in Vietnam, 59.1 per cent in China, and 80.7 per cent in Nigeria. At the state level, Bihar records an FLFPR of just 24.7 per cent, while Uttar Pradesh (UP) stands at 32.4 per cent, Jharkhand at 43.7 per cent, and Odisha at 47.3 per cent. Bihar also reports the highest fertility rate at 2.8, compared to the all-India figure of 1.9 (Sample Registration System, 2023), consistent with its high annual population growth rate of 1.43 per cent against the national average of 0.9 per cent. More concerning, it is girls in Bihar who exhibit the highest dropout rates in schools across states: 8.7 per cent at the primary level, 25.9 per cent at the secondary level, and 25.1 per cent at the higher secondary level (Unified District Information System for Education Plus, Ministry of Education 2023-24).

Under such socio-economic conditions, how can one empower women?

Skilling and training form a crucial pillar of financial independence. The government deserves credit for establishing the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in 2014, now spanning 38 sectors, with a 2026-27 allocation of Rs 9,886 crore, with Rs 3,400 crore for the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY). PMKVY provides free skills training with certification to youth aged 18-45. Even with skill training, which sector can better absorb this trained population?

Look to East and Southeast Asia. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China, and Vietnam used the garment sector to transition women into the formal wage economy. India's apparel sector generates 153 jobs per Rs 1 crore of capital invested, compared to 27 in automobile manufacturing and just 14 in steel (Annual Survey of Industries, 2023-24). But the number that deserves attention is this: The apparel sector creates 55 female jobs per Rs 1 crore investment, while automobiles and steel generate fewer than one. If nari shakti is not to be reduced to a slogan, then the garment sector is the most powerful instrument.

Garment clusters like Tiruppur employ thousands of women, and a large majority of them come from Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and UP. They need hostel facilities and stay far away from their families. It leads to high attrition rates and loss of talent. But what if garment clusters are developed in states that supply surplus labour all over India?

In Muzaffarpur, Bihar, Pearl Global Industries has taken this initiative and set up a manufacturing unit that offers a glimpse of what this transition may look like. As of early 2026, the factory employed 650 workers on 500 machines, with plans to scale to 3,000 workers by March-April 2027. Almost 90 per cent of the workforce is female – residents of the district itself. All are first-generation factory workers; women with no prior industrial experience, trained from scratch by the firm. This is a private firm making a commercially rational bet: That a woman worker in a labour-surplus state, if trained, will be productive, reliable, and loyal. In the course of this transition, she retains her social ties, her family, her community. The Centre and states can incentivise such firms in the apparel sector.

The PM MITRA scheme, designed to create large-scale, plug-and-play textile parks with shared infrastructure, represents exactly the kind of instrument needed. Yet, Bihar does not have a single PM MITRA park, nor Jharkhand or Odisha. UP, the most populous state in India, has just one such park.

The challenge is in skilling the women workforce that makes those factories globally competitive. Bihar's industrial policy recognises this. Training incentives of up to Rs 20,000 per worker exist on paper. Employment-linked incentives allow textile units to claim a subsidy of up to Rs 5,000 per month per employee, or reimbursement of up to 300 per cent of employer contributions to ESI and EPF.

It is the weak training infrastructure and poor industry alignment that are the problem. China and Vietnam developed cluster-anchored training institutions that evolved alongside industry, with curricula designed by firms and quality assurance maintained by the state. Bihar needs to make a similar transition.

Three shifts are essential. First, invest in training infrastructure and curriculum quality, co-managed by industry, government, and technical institutions. Public money should fund infrastructure and quality assurance; firms should lead curriculum design and on-the-job upgrading. Second, restructure employment-linked incentives to be explicitly linked to the employment of women with higher subsidy rates, particularly in the first two years of employment when attrition and training costs are highest. Third, bring infrastructure to where the women are. The PM MITRA scheme may be the right instrument, but it has to open such parks in Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha that supply labour to southern clusters. That would build true *nari shakti*. Will the government focus on this? Only time will tell.

Gulati is distinguished professor, Gupta is research associate, and Chanda is research assistant at ICRIER. Views are personal

The PM MITRA scheme, designed to create large-scale, plug-and-play textile parks with shared infrastructure, represents exactly the kind of instrument needed

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Women's Reservation Act, 2023 provides 33% reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies.
- Implementation is delayed due to linkage with delimitation exercise.
- Women's representation in legislatures remains below the proposed quota.
- Debate has emerged on whether political reservation alone ensures real empowerment.
- Focus shifting towards economic empowerment through employment, skilling, and labour force participation.

Key Points

- Female Labour Force Participation (FLFPR):
  - India: ~32–40% (PLFS, ILO estimates)
  - Much lower than Vietnam, China, Nigeria
- Regional disparities:
  - Bihar lowest (~24.7%), Odisha higher (~47.3%)
- Social constraints:
  - High fertility rates, female school dropout (UDISE+ data)
- Skilling initiatives:
  - Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana – skill training with certification
- Employment potential:
  - Apparel sector generates highest jobs per unit of capital
  - High share of female employment compared to heavy industries
- Industrial policy tool:
  - PM MITRA Scheme for textile clusters
  - Limited presence in labour-surplus states

Static Linkages

- Equality and livelihood principles under DPSPs (Articles 39, 42)
- Demographic dividend and human capital
- Labour-intensive industrialisation model (East Asia)
- Role of education in reducing fertility and improving workforce participation
- Informal vs formal employment structure
- Skill development and productivity linkages

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Reservation improves political inclusion
- Textile sector offers scalable employment for women
- Skill development programmes enhance employability
- Decentralised industrialisation reduces distress migration

Negatives

- Political reservation ≠ economic empowerment
- Low FLFPR reflects structural gender barriers
- Skill mismatch and weak training infrastructure
- Poor industrial ecosystem in backward states

Challenges

- Social norms restricting women's work
- Education dropouts among girls
- Lack of industry-linked training
- Regional imbalance in industrial development

Way Forward

- Link skilling programmes with industry demand
- Expand PM MITRA Scheme to labour-surplus regions
- Provide incentives for women employment
- Strengthen female education and retention
- Develop cluster-based industrial training systems
- Improve safety, mobility, and workplace infrastructure

Season of scarcity, rich for reform

CROPS NEED water and nutrients for growth and sufficient grain yields. The signals on both fronts aren't encouraging for the upcoming agricultural year. The India Meteorological Department has forecast a "below normal" southwest monsoon, with nationwide rainfall during June-September at 92 per cent of the long period average for the season. Even if the anticipated El Niño becomes a "strong" event only towards the end of the four-month season, its association with warmer-than-normal winters can also have an impact on the 2026-27 rabi crop, in addition to the one whose planting will start in a month's time. But more than water – improved irrigation coverage has over the years made Indian agriculture relatively resilient against subnormal rains – it is plant nutrients that should be real cause for concern.

The current supply shock in fertilisers is unprecedented. Prices of urea and di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) imported into India haven't yet surged to the highs of late-2021 to mid-2022 (just before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine) or even the 2008 global food crisis. But those were largely price shocks. The ongoing one, from the conflict in West Asia, is a supply shock that extends beyond finished fertilisers to key raw materials/intermediates such as natural gas, ammonia and sulphur too. The crisis today isn't of prices alone, but of availability itself. The Strait of Hormuz's effective closure has affected around one-third of the world's seaborne fertiliser trade. With other major producers like Russia (which has a one-fifth share of the global trade) and China (India's biggest urea and DAP supplier till 2023-24) also prioritising domestic availability and restricting exports, the shortages would only mount. India will feel the pressure, especially as it has hardly any gas, rock phosphate, potash or mineable sulphur reserves and is predominantly import dependent in plant nutrients.

2026-27 could well be a perfect storm for Indian agriculture, but also an opportunity for reforms where kicking the can down the road isn't an option any longer. There are limits to subsiding products whose supply is itself in question. In the case of fertilisers, the focus must be on augmenting availability – including of alternative nutrient sources – rather than artificial underpricing that would only aggravate shortages. The government should muster the courage to deregulate retail prices of urea, DAP and all other fertilisers. Replace the existing product-wise subsidy regime with a flat per-acre payment of, say, Rs 5,000 for all cultivating farmers. The monies from both the fertiliser subsidy and PM-Kisan can be redirected and repurposed towards what can become a genuinely pro-farmer direct income support scheme.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- India Meteorological Department forecasts 92% of Long Period Average (LPA) rainfall → "below normal" southwest monsoon (2026).
- Likely El Niño conditions may affect both kharif (2026) and rabi (2026–27) output.
- Ongoing fertiliser supply shock due to geopolitical tensions in West Asia.
- Disruptions in Strait of Hormuz affecting ~1/3rd of global fertiliser trade.
- Export restrictions by Russia and China aggravating shortages.
- India remains import-dependent for fertiliser inputs (urea feedstock, potash, phosphates, sulphur).

Key Points

- Monsoon
  - 92% LPA → not drought, but risk of uneven distribution + extreme events.
  - El Niño → weaker monsoon + warmer winters.
- Fertiliser Crisis
  - Nature: Supply shock (availability issue), not just price rise.
  - Affects finished fertilisers + raw materials (gas, ammonia, sulphur).
- India's Dependence
  - Potash: ~100% import dependent.
  - Phosphatic fertilisers: high import dependence.
  - Urea: dependent on imported natural gas.
- Subsidy Issue
  - Product-based subsidy → cheap urea.
  - Leads to N:P:K imbalance (skewed towards nitrogen).
  - High fiscal burden (Economic Survey trend).
- Reform Suggestion
  - Deregulate fertiliser prices.
  - Replace subsidies with direct income transfer (per acre basis).
  - Rationalise schemes like PM-Kisan.

Static Linkages

- ENSO (El Niño) and Indian Monsoon relationship.
- Green Revolution inputs: HYV seeds, fertilisers, irrigation.
- Ideal N:P:K ratio (4:2:1) vs Indian imbalance.
- Subsidy vs DBT debate (efficiency vs equity).
- Food security and MSP system.
- Import dependence and current account implications.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Direct income support:
  - Reduces distortions in fertiliser use.
  - Enhances farmer choice and efficiency.
- Deregulation:
  - Encourages balanced nutrient application.
  - Reduces fiscal burden.

Negatives

- Price deregulation:
  - May increase input cost burden on small farmers.
- DBT challenges:
  - Exclusion of tenant farmers.
- Supply shock:
  - Risk to crop yields and food inflation.

Way Forward

- Gradual fertiliser price deregulation (phased approach).
- Expand DBT to include tenant and sharecroppers.
- Promote alternative nutrients (nano-urea, biofertilisers).
- Strengthen soil health card usage.
- Build strategic fertiliser reserves.
- Diversify import sources and boost domestic production capacity.
- Promote climate-resilient agriculture (micro-irrigation, diversification).