



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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**CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

VB-G RAM G to take effect on July 1

All rules, notifications, schemes, orders and guidelines made under MGNREGA will stand repealed from July 1; however, the government did not clarify crucial aspects, including objective parameters and formula for deciding the normative budget, which will determine the share of each State

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Considering the final budget on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, the Union government on Monday notified that from July 1, all "rules, notifications, schemes, orders and guidelines" made under the law will stand repealed, and the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) [VB-G RAM G] will come to force.

Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan expressed confidence that the move marks the dawn of a "new era in the lives of labourers". He said the scheme would prove to be a milestone in fulfilling the resolve to build "developed villages" as a foundation for a "developed India".

He also noted that the process of framing the rules for the new Act is under way following consultations with the States. "No labourer is deprived of employment during this transition phase. Comprehens-



Members of the MGNREGA Defence Alliance, Karnataka, staging a protest against the VB-G RAM G Act in Bengaluru in February. J. ALLEN IGENGIE

No clarity on details

Though the government issued a note answering frequently asked questions, it did not clarify crucial aspects, including the objective parameters and formula for deciding the normative budget, which will determine how much each State receives. Under MGNREGA, the Centre paid 100% of the wage bill; under the new scheme, the expenditure will be split between the Centre and the States in a 60:40 ratio

for most States.

The VB-G RAM G legislation was passed by Parliament in December last year, without pre-legislative consultations. After its passage, the government has held weekly meetings with State rural development departments to build the infrastructure required for implementation.

The new scheme increases the statutory em-

ployment guarantee from 100 days to 125 days in every financial year.

The government clarified that existing job cards that are e-KYC verified will remain valid until Gramin Rozgar Guarantee cards are issued. As per a recent study by LibTech, a consortium of activists and academics, as of May 7, 2026, 11.58 crore registered workers (45.4%) and 0.95

crore active workers (9.5%)

are yet to complete e-KYC. "Workers shall not be denied employment merely due to pending e-KYC, and facilitation mechanisms have been provided for completion of e-KYC, including at work sites, wherever necessary," the government note said.

It also clarified that workers may continue to demand employment oral-

ly, by writing through the existing Form-G framework, or through digital platforms. Provisions carried over from MGNREGA, such as unemployment compensation in case of failure to provide work, will continue.

Attendance will continue to be captured through the National Mobile Monitoring System, despite concerns over reliance on digital systems in areas with patchy internet coverage. Ongoing works under MGNREGA as on the date of commencement may continue under the new Act. Where ongoing works are insufficient to meet demand, new works consistent with Schedule I of the new Act may be taken up.

Blackout period

The legislation provides for a blackout period of up to 60 days, to be notified by the States, ostensibly to ensure the availability of agricultural labour during peak sowing and harvesting seasons. This clause has drawn criticism for reducing workers' bargaining power.

Aspect	MGNREGA	VB-G RAM G
Wage Funding	100% by Centre	60:40 Centre-State sharing
Budgeting	Open-ended demand-based	Normative budgeting
Attendance	Manual + digital	NMMS-based digital attendance
Agricultural Restriction	No blackout period	Up to 60-day blackout possible

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Union Government has notified that from 1 July 2026, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005 framework will be repealed.
- It will be replaced by Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) [VB-G RAM G].
- The new legislation was passed by Parliament in December 2025.
- The new framework changes the structure of rural employment guarantees, funding pattern, and implementation mechanism.
- The government stated that no labourer will be deprived of employment during the transition phase.

Key Provisions of the New Scheme

- Employment guarantee increased from 100 days to 125 days annually.
- Existing MGNREGA job cards with e-KYC remain temporarily valid.
- Workers can continue demanding work:
 - orally,
 - through written applications,
 - digitally.
- Provision for unemployment allowance retained.
- Attendance to continue through National Mobile Monitoring System (NMMS).
- Ongoing MGNREGA works may continue under the new Act.

Major Changes from MGNREGA

Aspect	MGNREGA	VB-G RAM G
Nature	Demand-driven legal guarantee	Normative allocation-based framework
Work Guarantee	100 days	125 days

Important Concerns

1. Dilution of Rights-Based Approach
 - MGNREGA was considered a rights-based welfare legislation.
 - Normative budgeting may weaken the legal guarantee of work.
2. Fiscal Burden on States
 - States now required to contribute to wage expenditure.
 - Poorer States may face implementation difficulties.
3. Digital Exclusion
 - Dependence on:
 - e-KYC,
 - mobile attendance,
 - internet connectivity.
 - May exclude vulnerable workers in rural areas.
4. Blackout Period Provision
 - States can suspend employment guarantee during peak agricultural seasons.
 - Criticism:
 - weakens labour bargaining power,
 - benefits large farmers,
 - reduces worker autonomy.
5. Federalism Concerns
 - Limited pre-legislative consultation with States.
 - Raises questions on cooperative federalism.

Important Data

- According to LibTech (May 2026):
 - 11.58 crore registered workers (45.4%) pending e-KYC.
 - 0.95 crore active workers (9.5%) pending e-KYC.

Constitutional & Governance Linkages

- Article 41 – Right to work (Directive Principles).
- Article 39(a) – Adequate livelihood.
- Welfare State principle.
- Decentralisation through Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- Social audit and participatory governance.
- Inclusive growth and rural development.

Prelims Pointers

- MGNREGA enacted in 2005.
- Provides legal guarantee of wage employment.
- Originally guaranteed 100 days of work.
- Social audit is mandatory under MGNREGA.
- Gram Sabha plays important role in identification of works.
- MGNREGA is implemented by Ministry of Rural Development.

Mains Value Addition

Arguments Supporting the New Scheme

- Increased employment guarantee.
- Better integration with livelihood creation.
- Greater State accountability.
- Potential reduction in leakages through digital monitoring.

Criticisms

- Weakening of demand-driven nature.
- Possible exclusion due to digital dependency.
- Increased financial burden on States.
- Concerns regarding labour rights during blackout periods.

Way Forward

- Retain genuine demand-driven employment guarantee.
- Ensure no exclusion due to digital barriers.
- Strengthen social audits and grievance redressal.
- Provide additional support to fiscally weak States.
- Increase transparency in budget allocation formula.
- Improve internet and digital infrastructure in rural areas.
- Ensure Gram Sabha participation in planning and monitoring.

The enduring democratic message of a royal charter

Magna...what? Most contemporary readers and viewers of news would, on hearing or reading that phrase, ask. But not those interested in history, the rule of law, the rights of citizens, the supremacy of ethics over politics in the running of governments.

King Charles III of the United Kingdom in his speech on April 28, to the U.S. Congress in Washington DC used the phrase to thunderous applause. He is very much into the history of his country. He has to be, as a successor of King John (c.1167-1216) who unveiled, or was forced to unveil the Magna Carta. 'John who?' could well be the next question. So lacking in luck was King John that no monarch in England has been given that name ever since. There has been no King John II. But he is famous for having decreed and given, or made to decree and give, not just to his country and people, but to the world, the Magna Carta.

The over 800-year-old royal charter of rights sealed by King John at Runnymede, near Windsor, on June 15, 1215 owes its name to Latin, the language of Cicero and Seneca, in which the phrase means Great Charter. Magna Carta has come to mean, for those interested in the evolution of the political rights of people, a metaphor for any text that inscribes such rights as inherent in people, rather than being conferred without checks in any individual or organ of state.

Singularly unpopular for his whimsies, King John had to make peace with a group of rebel barons who demanded that the King sign himself out of arbitrary power and, most important of all, proclaim that he was subservient to law or what, in today's legal parlance would be called 'due process'. In referring to the Magna Carta, King Charles III was drawing attention to the limits of his own or any sovereign, including, in today's world, elected 'sovereigns'. Small wonder that legislators in Washington DC greeted the reference with élan.

Subtle language craftsmanship
Does King Charles write his own speeches? It is more than likely that for a state visit such as this to the U.S., the British monarch had his speeches drafted by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. This, not just because they were to come from Britain's reigning King but because they were to be made in the world's most powerful nation currently at war, as seen by the world as one that has been started by the personal decision of U.S. President Donald Trump. And that is where Britain's subtle ways with the language of William Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde and George Orwell came in handy. Also its interiorisation of Latinitas and Latin concepts



Gopal Krishna Gandhi
Teacher, former administrator, diplomat and Governor

that have grown into English usage. The term Magna Carta was per se coined, according to Wikipedia, by 'scribes in the English Royal Chancery around 1215-1217'. Three clauses of the Magna Carta remain on Britain's statute, of which the following is most impressive: 'No Freeman shall be taken or imprisoned, or be disseised of his Freehold, or Liberties, or free Customs, or be outlawed, or exiled, or any other wise destroyed; nor will we not pass upon him, nor condemn him, but by lawful judgment of his Peers, or by the Law of the land. We will sell to no man, we will not deny or defer to any man either Justice or Right.'

The phrase has been used down the centuries as a metaphor.

As a barrister working for Indian South Africans' political rights in the late 19th century, Mohandas K. Gandhi cited Queen Victoria's extinguishing the overarching powers of the East India Company over the destiny of India in her Proclamation of 1858, as a Magna Carta. In 1948, Eleanor Roosevelt, while working on the UN Declaration of Human Rights as the committee's chair, famously called the UN document the "international Magna Carta of all men everywhere". Winston Churchill referred to it as a "law which is above the King", and argued that the reaffirmation of a supreme law justified the respect it has held through time.

Contextual messaging
King Charles was not handing down to the U.S. Congress a tedious lesson in the history of the historical Magna Carta. But he did something that was altogether classy. Knowing full well that he was addressing a House comprising both Republican and Democratic legislators, he knew that when he said to that gathering, that the Magna Carta made the King subservient to the law, his listeners would transpose his remarks right onto what is happening in the U.S., to its state and government.

The King made more than one reference to the Magna Carta, and mentioned the fact that the parchment linked the political history of Great Britain and the U.S. Inextricably, that a large number of judgments in the U.S. courts cited Magna Carta, making that tract a U.K.-U.S. bond. But it was when he said very simply and matter-of-factly, that the Magna Carta had made "executive power subject to checks and balances", that the House, after a moment of reflective absorption, rose in a thunderous standing ovation. All present, starting doubtless with Democrats, saw before them a direct successor to King John of Magna Carta fame, speaking of the Magna Carta's limiting arbitrariness in the monarch – a huge, self-limiting, self-denying, self-critical exposition

of 'due process' of the rule of law as being above the person of the ruler, with the Magna Carta being above the King.

The importance of the 'Magna' code
The speech's salience in today's Washington aside, it should be seen as having been made to all Parliaments and legislatures across the world, affirming that all people of the world – whether in the west or east, north or south, geographically or metaphorically – live with the expectation that the laws governing them are made by their representatives, for a humane, just, and moral order. That they are implemented fairly, equitably, transparently. That those in charge of the process are not governed by whimsy, caprice or bias. And that they are subservient to such laws, not the other way around. And that waging wars, waging peace are part of that 'Magna' code.

The speech, having been made in the parliament of what is called, not unambitiously, the world's oldest (continuous constitutional) democracy, was not partisan. It was not taking sides between elected legislators of diverse opinion and the executive. Indeed, it could not have, in good protocol and better prudence. It said, without stating it explicitly, that the spirit of the Magna Carta holds that those seeking and receiving popular mandates to form an executive are also under the scrutiny of parallel and co-extensive checks and balances. What has been called the "breoding spirit of the law" casts an obligation on the legislature and judiciary to ensure that democracy is not trampled, as it was in India during the infamous Emergency of 1975-77, by the robotic power of a "benevolent parliamentary majority," or by subtler, more devious methods of manipulation and subversion that play on human emotions, sentiments, and suspicions, which can lead to ethnic tensions, presaging civil strife – a form of 'within country' war – such as every continent has known.

History has known heretofore to give the world villains as kings, violence as creed. It has also known credulity to give the world duly elected counterparts of such kings, creeds. Today, when massively contested elections in India east and south (in terms of voting percentages) have brought about new governments in three, and reinstated one, it is important, and indeed critical, for electors and the elected to note that over any formation of government, there exists a monitor of morality which obligates democratically and federally ethical conduct. It is a curious felicity that a reigning king wearing a heritable crown should have spoken democratic home truths to a great Parliament citing a Latin code and receive a standing ovation. There is hope for truth. Or, in Latin, spes veritatis est.

- Basic Structure Doctrine
- Separation of Powers
- Constitutional Morality
- Important constitutional concern:
 - Excessive concentration of executive authority weakens democratic institutions.

Static Linkages

- Rule of Law → A.V. Dicey
- Equality before law → Article 14
- Judicial Review → Articles 13, 32, 226
- Constitutional Supremacy
- Separation of Powers
- Basic Structure Doctrine → Kesavananda Bharati Case (1973)
- ADM Jabalpur Case (1976)
- Constitutional Morality → Dr. B.R. Ambedkar
- Checks and Balances in democratic governance

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reinforces supremacy of law over arbitrary authority.
- Protects civil liberties and democratic rights.
- Strengthens accountability of elected governments.
- Ensures institutional balance among organs of state.

Challenges

- Executive dominance over institutions.
- Misuse of emergency powers.
- Weak parliamentary scrutiny.
- Political polarization affecting democratic functioning.
- Delays in justice delivery weaken Rule of Law.

Way Forward

- Strengthen institutional independence.
- Ensure robust parliamentary oversight.
- Promote constitutional literacy.
- Safeguard judicial autonomy.
- Uphold constitutional morality in governance.
- Prevent concentration of executive powers.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- King Charles III, during his address to the U.S. Congress, referred to the Magna Carta (1215) and highlighted that executive power must remain subject to "checks and balances."
- The reference gained significance amid global debates on:
 - Constitutionalism
 - Executive accountability
 - Democratic backsliding
 - Rule of Law
- Magna Carta is regarded as the foundational document for limiting arbitrary state power and establishing constitutional governance.

Key Points

- Magna Carta (1215):
 - Signed between King John and English barons.
 - Established that the ruler is not above law.
 - Introduced the concept of:
 - Rule of Law
 - Due Process
 - Limited Government
- Influenced:
 - British constitutional evolution
 - U.S. Constitution
 - Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
 - Modern democratic constitutions
- Indian constitutional parallels:
 - Article 14 → Equality before law
 - Judicial Review

A new phase in the India-Vietnam strategic partnership

The state visit of Vietnamese President Tô Lâm to India last week (May 5-7, 2026) marks a consequential moment in the steady deepening of India-Vietnam ties, reflecting both the maturation of a long-standing partnership and the sharpening strategic imperatives of the Indo-Pacific. The decision to elevate bilateral relations to an Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, along with a wide range of agreements spanning defence, technology, finance, and energy, signals not merely incremental progress but a qualitative shift in the trajectory of the relationship.

The visit comes at a time of heightened geopolitical flux in the Indo-Pacific as Vietnam finds itself navigating an increasingly assertive China in the South China Sea, while India continues to consolidate its Act East policy into a more security-oriented Indo-Pacific strategy. The convergence of these perceptions, particularly regarding maritime coercion, supply chain vulnerabilities, and strategic autonomy, has provided a durable foundation for bilateral engagement. Indeed, the evolution of India-Vietnam ties has been gradual but structurally consistent, with India's erstwhile Look East (now Act East) policy providing the initial impetus and the elevation to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2016 enabling institutionalised defence and security cooperation. Since then, regular high-level exchanges, defence dialogues, and capacity-building initiatives have deepened trust.



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current debates around the possible shipment of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles demonstrate a change in the deterrence calculation in the South China Sea from capacity building to capability enhancement.

Similarly, economic ties, while less prominent historically, are now acquiring greater salience. Bilateral trade has crossed \$16 billion, with an ambitious target of \$25 billion by 2030, underscoring the recognition of untapped potential. A move toward next-generation economic participation is shown in the focus on supply chain resilience, rare earth collaboration, and digital payment integration. Moreover, Vietnam's position as an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) manufacturing powerhouse makes it an essential partner for India's diversification plans, especially in terms of scaling back reliance on supply chains that are mostly focused on China.

The regional impact
This deepening partnership has important regional ramifications. First, the relationship between India and Vietnam forms an important component of multilateral balancing in the Indo-Pacific.

Together with Japan, Australia, and the United States, both nations contribute to a wider network of strategic alliances that fight to maintain a rules-based maritime order, even if they are not legally included in U.S.-led alliance structures. A common normative framework intended to combat unilateralism in the South China Sea is shown in the explicit focus of joint statements on the "rule of law, peace, and stability".

Second, the partnership underscores the growing centrality of ASEAN in India's Indo-Pacific vision. Vietnam, as one of ASEAN's more geopolitically assertive and strategically

consequential members, serves as a linchpin for India's deeper engagement with Southeast Asia. At the same time, Hanoi's own foreign policy, characterised by diversification and strategic hedging, finds a natural complement in India's multipronged partnership approach.

Third, the expansion of cooperation into areas such as critical minerals and emerging technologies points to the evolving nature of strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific. Partnerships such as the India-Vietnam partnership will be crucial in shaping alternative economic architectures as global supply chains become more securitised. The agreements made during the visit point to an effort to move beyond conventional economic ties in favour of a more comprehensive framework for economic security.

Structural issues
Looking ahead, the trajectory of India-Vietnam ties will depend on the ability of both sides to translate strategic intent into operational outcomes. Implementation gaps, particularly in trade, connectivity, and defence industrial cooperation, remain despite the strong political and strategic alignment. For example, navigating scientific, financial, and geopolitical obstacles will be necessary to realise defence exports such as BrahMos. In a similar vein, resolving structural obstacles, including logistics, legal frameworks, and private sector involvement, will be necessary to meet the ambitious trade goals.

India-Vietnam relations are likely to become increasingly embedded within the evolving architecture of the Indo-Pacific. Partnerships that combine functional cooperation with strategic trust will become more important as great power competition heats up. Hence, Mr. Tô Lâm's visit is more about marking the beginning of bilateral ties as a mature, multifaceted partnership than about a single diplomatic milestone.

The pillar of defence cooperation
Defence cooperation, in particular, has emerged as the backbone of the partnership. In addition to symbolic actions such as the transfer of the missile corvette, *INS Kirpan* (in 2023), India has offered Vietnam finance lines, training assistance, and maritime cooperation structures. The

Indo-Pacific dynamics are reshaping the India-Vietnam bilateral relationship

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Vietnamese President Tô Lâm visited India during May 5–7, 2026.
- India and Vietnam elevated bilateral ties to an Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
- Agreements signed in:
 - Defence
 - Maritime security
 - Rare earth cooperation
 - Digital payments
 - Energy and technology
- Visit assumes significance amid:
 - Rising tensions in South China Sea
 - China's maritime assertiveness
 - Growing Indo-Pacific strategic competition
- India reaffirmed support for:
 - ASEAN centrality
 - Rule-based maritime order
 - Freedom of navigation under UNCLOS 1982.

Key Points

- India–Vietnam relations upgraded from:
 - Strategic Partnership (2007)
 - Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2016)
 - Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2026)
- Defence cooperation is the central pillar of ties.
- India transferred *INS Kirpan* to Vietnam in 2023.
- BrahMos missile export discussions indicate deeper strategic trust.
- Bilateral trade crossed \$16 billion.
- Trade target: \$25 billion by 2030.
- Vietnam is strategically important for:
 - Supply chain diversification
 - Indo-Pacific balancing
 - ASEAN outreach

- Cooperation expanding into:
 - Critical minerals
 - Semiconductor ecosystem
 - Emerging technologies
 - Maritime security
- Both countries support:
 - UNCLOS 1982
 - Peaceful dispute resolution
 - Strategic autonomy.

Static Linkages

- Act East Policy replaced Look East Policy in 2014.
- ASEAN centrality is a key pillar of India's Indo-Pacific vision.
- UNCLOS 1982 governs maritime boundaries and EEZ rights.
- South China Sea is strategically important for global trade routes.
- Strategic autonomy remains a core principle of Indian foreign policy.
- Rare earth minerals are critical for defence and clean-energy technologies.
- Minilateralism refers to flexible issue-based strategic cooperation.
- Defence diplomacy includes:
 - Military training
 - Defence exports
 - Joint exercises
 - Maritime cooperation

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens India's strategic footprint in Southeast Asia.
- Enhances maritime balancing in Indo-Pacific.
- Supports diversification away from China-centric supply chains.
- Expands India's defence exports.
- Reinforces India's Act East Policy.

Challenges

- Possible Chinese strategic backlash.
- Connectivity and logistics bottlenecks.
- Slow implementation of defence projects.
- Limited private-sector participation.
- ASEAN internal divisions on South China Sea issues.

Way Forward

- Fast-track defence industrial cooperation.
- Enhance maritime domain awareness sharing.
- Expand cooperation in semiconductors and rare earths.
- Improve connectivity and trade facilitation.
- Strengthen ASEAN-led Indo-Pacific mechanisms.
- Increase private-sector and technological collaboration.

Belated warning

Narendra Modi's suggestions to Indians imply a serious economic impact

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's seven-point call to action for the citizens of India lays bare the severity of the impact of the West Asia crisis. Further, apart from its implications, Mr. Modi's message is problematic for two other key reasons: its timing and content. A key part of his message was to urge people to work from home and reduce their fuel usage. A more effective approach might have been to lead by example. Yet, Mr. Modi's message comes days after he and his Cabinet colleagues flew all over the country and organised roadshows to campaign for the recent elections. Neither did any of his pre-election speeches mention these issues. His message also comes on the back of daily reassurances by his government's officials that there was nothing to worry. Clearly, there is. The Prime Minister's message also follows various Ministers' attempts to heap praise on him for not raising petrol and diesel prices. A decision not to further burden the common man is welcome, but the flip side is that it fails to impress upon them the need to curtail consumption. The government took that strategic call before the elections, and is now trying to dilute it. Perhaps a hike in fuel prices will follow soon. The Prime Minister's speech also coincided with a similar call to action for Indian corporates by the Confederation of Indian Industry. This kind of coordinated messaging points to a dire situation. Several of the Prime Minister's suggestions might also have other negative impacts that could be more serious than the problems they are trying to address. Some others might simply not be as effective as he hopes.

If farmers stop using chemical fertilizers, as he has urged, the immediate impact will be on crop output at a time when El Niño is already set to hurt it. High-frequency indicators are already revealing the economic damage of the West Asia crisis. This will only exacerbate the situation. The suggestion to stop foreign travel will conserve foreign exchange, but Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data up to February 2026 shows that Indians' foreign travel spending in 2025-26 was already down by 3% March, the first month after the Iran war broke out, is likely to have seen an even sharper decline. The real pressure on the rupee and India's foreign exchange is because foreign institutional investors are pulling out while the RBI is using valuable dollars to shore up the falling currency. Urging Indians to buy local is another way of asking them to consume less, since purely domestic supply is not nearly enough to cater to the demand. Asking them to buy less gold is also likely to be futile. All this means that the economy is in for a hard time over the next few months – a warning the Prime Minister should have delivered much earlier, elections or no elections.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed to citizens to:
 - Reduce fuel consumption,
 - Work from home,
 - Buy local products,
 - Reduce gold purchases,
 - Avoid unnecessary foreign travel,
 - Use fertilizers judiciously.
- The appeal comes amid:
 - Escalating conflict in West Asia,
 - Rising global crude oil prices,
 - Pressure on Indian rupee and forex reserves,
 - Fear of imported inflation.
- India imports around 85% of its crude oil requirement, making it vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions in West Asia.
- Concerns have increased regarding:
 - Current Account Deficit (CAD),
 - Inflation,
 - Fiscal stress,
 - Agricultural output under possible El Niño conditions.

Key Points

- West Asia is strategically important for India's:
 - Energy security,

- Trade,
- Diaspora,
- Maritime interests.
- Increase in crude oil prices affects:
 - Inflation (CPI/WPI),
 - Fiscal deficit,
 - CAD,
 - Rupee value.
- Foreign Institutional Investor (FII) outflows increase pressure on forex reserves.
- RBI intervenes in forex markets to stabilize rupee volatility.
- Gold imports significantly impact India's import bill.
- Reduced fertilizer use without alternatives may affect food security and crop productivity.
- "Buy Local" aligns with Atmanirbhar Bharat and import substitution strategy.
- Work-from-home recommendation reflects demand-side energy management.

Static Linkages

- Oil price shocks historically affected Indian economy during:
 - 1973 Oil Crisis,
 - Gulf War,
 - Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- Current Account Deficit widens when import expenditure rises sharply.
- Imported inflation occurs when global commodity prices rise.
- Forex reserves are used to stabilize exchange rate volatility.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves help manage energy supply disruptions.
- El Niño conditions can weaken monsoon and reduce agricultural output.
- Fertilizer subsidies form an important component of India's agricultural support system.
- Energy diversification improves economic resilience.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Encourages resource conservation.
- May reduce pressure on fuel imports and CAD.
- Supports domestic manufacturing.
- Promotes long-term energy efficiency.
- Reduction in gold imports can improve external balances.

Concerns

- Delay in public warning despite visible global crisis.
- Reduced fertilizer use may lower agricultural productivity.
- Domestic manufacturing capacity may not fully meet demand.
- Consumption slowdown can affect economic growth.
- FII outflows and rupee depreciation require structural policy response.

Way Forward

- Diversify crude oil import sources.
- Expand renewable energy capacity.
- Increase Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Promote energy-efficient public transport.
- Improve fertilizer-use efficiency through nano-fertilizers.
- Strengthen export competitiveness.
- Enhance domestic manufacturing under PLI schemes.
- Maintain transparent economic communication during crises.

Ugly bout

The timing of the show-cause notice to Vinesh Phogat is suspect

Double World championships bronze medalist Vinesh Phogat's comeback bid after a sabbatical following the Paris Olympics hit a roadblock when the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) found her ineligible as per a United World Wrestling (UWW) rule, which requires retired athletes to inform the world body six months prior to their intended return to competition. With an eye on the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, Phogat – a prominent face in the 2023 wrestlers' protest and one of the six women who brought allegations of sexual harassment and started a legal battle against former WFI president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh – was aiming for a brave comeback in the Open Ranking tournament at the Nandini Nagar Mahavidyalaya; Brij Bhushan, also a Gonda strongman and former BJP Member of Parliament, owns it. The National Federation, which is headed by Brij Bhushan's close aide Sanjay Singh, also issued a show-cause notice to Phogat on three separate, prominent grounds. Firstly, that she did not adhere to the 50kg weight limit and was disqualified after reaching the final at the Paris Olympics. It resulted in her disqualification, a loss of medal and negative publicity. Second, as an athlete in the registered testing pool, who is required to give a time slot every day and be available for dope tests, she had multiple whereabouts failures, including on December 18, shortly after announcing her comeback. Third, Phogat violated a UWW rule by competing in two weight categories, 50kg and 53kg, at a selection trial in March 2024 for an Olympic qualifying event.

But the timing of the show-cause notice and the charges, which Phogat has rubbished, raises doubts about the intentions behind it. As for the Paris fiasco, it happened two years ago. Under World Anti-Doping Agency rules, three missed tests and/or filing failures within a 12-month period constitute an anti-doping rule violation. It is, however, not applicable in Phogat's case. Moreover, the UWW and National Anti-Doping Agency are the authorities concerned to deal with doping issues. The trials, in which Phogat participated in two weights, were held by an ad hoc body as the WFI was not recognised by the government at the time. As a parent body, the WFI should have shown maturity in handling Phogat's comeback. Instead, it clubbed together different matters spanning two years to thwart the 31-year-old's return. Phogat, who is a Congress legislator from Haryana, has shown her strong temperament and is working with her legal team to respond to the show-cause notice within 14 days. Meanwhile, the UWW should step in to stop the ugly bout between a decorated wrestler and the WFI. India can do without further embarrassment on this score.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Vinesh Phogat faced hurdles in her comeback attempt after the Wrestling Federation of India declared her ineligible under United World Wrestling (UWW) rules.
- UWW requires retired wrestlers to notify the body six months before returning to international competition.
- WFI issued a show-cause notice citing:
 - Disqualification at Paris Olympics after failing the 50 kg weight requirement.
 - Alleged whereabouts failures under anti-doping rules.
 - Participation in two weight categories during Olympic selection trials.
- The issue is linked to the 2023 wrestlers' protest against former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh over allegations of sexual harassment.
- The controversy has again highlighted concerns regarding transparency, athlete rights, and governance in sports federations.

Key Points

- UWW is the global governing body for wrestling.

- WFI is responsible for regulation and selection of wrestlers in India.
- World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) norms:
 - Three whereabouts failures within 12 months amount to an anti-doping rule violation.
- National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA):
 - Apex anti-doping body in India.
 - Functions under Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.
- Sports federations in India operate under the National Sports Development Code, 2011.
- Key concerns in Indian sports governance:
 - Politicisation of sports bodies
 - Conflict of interest
 - Lack of athlete representation
 - Weak grievance redressal systems
 - Gender safety concerns

Static Linkages

- Equality before law and equal protection of laws.
- Protection of dignity and safe working environment.
- Principles of natural justice:
 - Right to fair hearing
 - Rule against bias
- Transparency and accountability are essential features of good governance.
- Autonomous bodies receiving public support remain subject to public accountability.
- Ethical administration requires impartiality and fairness.
- Women's participation in public spaces requires institutional safeguards.
- International sports governance increasingly emphasizes athlete welfare and safe sport policies.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Highlights need for institutional accountability in sports governance.
- Reflects growing assertion of athlete rights in India.
- Brings focus on gender justice and safe sporting environments.

Concerns

- Timing of disciplinary action raises questions of selective targeting.
- Administrative disputes negatively affect athlete morale and preparation.
- Repeated controversies reduce India's credibility in global sports.

- Lack of independent grievance mechanisms weakens athlete confidence.

Governance Challenges

- Excessive political influence in sports federations.
- Weak implementation of governance reforms.
- Limited transparency in disciplinary and selection processes.
- Inadequate athlete participation in decision-making.

Ethical Dimensions

- Conflict between institutional authority and fairness.
- Need for impartial and non-retaliatory governance.
- Importance of safeguarding dignity of women athletes.

Way Forward

- Strengthen implementation of National Sports Development Code.
- Establish independent grievance redressal mechanism for athletes.
- Ensure athlete representation in federation governance.
- Improve transparency in selection and disciplinary proceedings.
- Strengthen gender-sensitivity and safe sport mechanisms.
- Reduce political interference in sports bodies.
- Enhance coordination among WFI, NADA, Sports Authority of India, and UWW.
- Promote ethics-based and athlete-centric sports administration.

Why saving forex could hamper India's growth



UDIT MISRA

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi has urged Indians to save foreign exchange (forex) by any means necessary.

In a recent speech, he called on Indians to stop buying gold for a year. Gold imports are a huge source of forex demand.

He also urged people to work from home to reduce consumption of imported crude oil, another big drain on forex. Modi asked people to cut down on use of edible oil in their food, saying this will not just reduce imports but also improve health. He appealed to farmers to have the use of chemical fertilisers, suggesting a shift to natural farming. He also underscored the need for buying "made in India" products instead of imported ones for everyday use. He also called on other organisations — from courts to labour unions to media — to help work towards this goal.

Link between forex and Modi's demand

This call comes in the wake of the war in Iran, and the associated supply and price shocks of goods like fuel and fertiliser.

When Indians buy imported goods — be it gold or a toothbrush or fertiliser or edible oil — India ends up exhausting its pile of forex held with the Reserve Bank of India. That's because imports involve Indians using their rupees to buy dollars and then using those dollars to buy imported goods.

Usually, foreigners worldwide also buy Indian goods; they use dollars to buy rupees, adding to Indian forex reserves.

But the situation can go off balance if India's imports far outstrip exports; here, India will keep spending dollars without getting as many in return.

If this sustains, it has two effects: one, India runs down its forex pile, and two, the rupee's exchange rate weakens against the dollar (or any other currency India uses to trade).

Another way through which forex comes in and out of India is foreign investments. While foreigners invest in India by either creating new businesses (foreign direct investment) or buying shares in listed Indian companies (foreign portfolio investment), Indians similarly invest abroad.

Since the economic reforms in 1991, Indians generally import more than they export — this is called running a "current account deficit" (CAD). Whereas foreigners invest in India more than Indians invest outside India — called a "capital account surplus" (CAS).

Typically, CAS is bigger than CAD, implying more dollars are coming in than going out and India adds to its forex reserves. This is technically called a "Balance of Payments (BoP) surplus".

When BoP goes into a deficit, either the rupee weakens or forex reserves fall — the latter happens if RBI defends the rupee's exchange rate by selling dollars in the market. Roughly since mid-2024, India's BoP surplus has taken a hit. While CAS hasn't worsened, CAS has shrunk — often, it has become a deficit itself.

As long as India is in surplus, RBI can either let the rupee's exchange rate strengthen or it can simply accumulate forex reserves. Often, RBI accumulates forex reserves for various reasons, one of them being that letting the rupee strengthen may not help Indian exports.

Moreover, healthy reserves help in times of crisis.

When BoP goes into a deficit, either the rupee weakens or forex reserves fall — the latter happens if RBI defends the rupee's exchange rate by selling dollars in the market.

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Chart 1 shows that India's current BoP situation appears as weak as it was in 2013, when Morgan Stanley designated India as one of the "fragile five" economies.

Thus, both ill-effects of a BoP deficit are happening. One, the rupee is weakening against the dollar (Chart 2) and second, RBI has been drawing down its forex reserves to defend the rupee's exchange rate (Chart 3).

The more the rupee weakens — thanks to India's heavy dependence on crude oil imports — the more the imports become costlier.

Will Modi's mantra help?

India can deal with the forex situation in two ways: one, either reduce demand for dollars by cutting domestic consumption, or two, boosting India's ability to earn more forex by improving domestic production.

Modi's suggestions are focused on cutting consumption while none focus on boosting production.

This has several implications. If all Indians were to suddenly stop using gold in all ceremonies and substitute it with fresh flowers plucked from the nearby garden, and if all Indians stopped stepping out from home for any reason (or just cycled),

PM Modi's solutions focus on cutting down consumption, but it will slow down India's growth. What is required is boosting India's production and productivity

Balance of Payment

BASE YEAR 2019-20 CURRENT ACCOUNT TOTAL BASE YEAR 2019-20 CAPITAL ACCOUNT TOTAL BASE YEAR 2023-23 CURRENT ACCOUNT TOTAL BASE YEAR 2023-23 CAPITAL ACCOUNT TOTAL

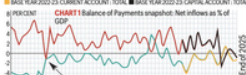


CHART 1 BoP Balance of Payments snapshot: Net inflows as % of GDP



CHART 2 RBI reference exchange rate of Indian Rupee against US dollar



CHART 3 Summary Monthly Indicators

then India's imports will fall since imports of gold and crude oil are majority why imports exceed exports. This will reduce demand for dollars by reducing or even eliminating CAD.

But this will likely come at the cost of overall economic growth because all businesses using these commodities will likely suffer lower sales, not to mention inefficiency due to cutbacks.

Weaker consumption will drag down growth in the immediate time period of the current year. Further, weak consumption levels are why businesses have not increased their investments into the Indian economy despite the government's best efforts.

Moreover, while consumption cuts help could further disincentivise businesses.

Healthy reserves help in times of crisis. Moreover, while consumption cuts help the current account, it may further worsen

the capital account. After all, why would foreign investors return to an economy they are already shunning, if that economy chooses to further roll back consumption?

Arguably, there can be another medium-term scenario: that consumption doesn't get reduced but gets diverted to Indian firms, and Indian businesses invest because Indians only prefer "made in India" goods. This would turn around the Indian economy by redirecting all demand towards Indian businesses.

By itself, the idea of becoming self-reliant sounds intuitively appealing. While it is an understandable goal, not every country can become self-reliant in everything.

For instance, while India is now self-reliant in food production, this depends on imported fertilisers. Even if India intends to make all its fertilisers at home, it is still reliant on imported feedstock fuels such as natural gas or naphtha, etc. that account for over 80% of the total domestic production cost of fertilisers. So, if India cannot be self-reliant in fertilisers, it can't really consider itself to be self-reliant in food production.

Similarly, India cannot replace imported crude oil with any domestic alternatives in a hurry; moreover, any shift will cause the economy to slow down. So, creating India's overall imports doesn't necessarily make the economy stronger; if anything, a forced reduction will slow down the economy.

Further, that too much use of chemical fertilisers is hurting India's soil is incorrect; actually, it is an underused use. The sole reason for this is the domestic subsidy regime that over-subsidises urea, making farmers to overuse it. Reducing use of chemical fertilisers and shifting to natural farming can only help to some extent.

Dealing with the forex issue

Cutting consumption in such a stark manner cannot be a sustainable solution. India needs to boost both its domestic production and productivity. Only when India becomes more efficient as a producer — regardless of what machines we import — will it be able to grow its share in the global exports market.

Similarly, only when India reforms its ease of doing business will it attract fresh investments either from within the country or from outside. Higher levels of exports and/or improved attractiveness in terms of starting and running a business is the actual recipe for dealing with the forex issue in a sustainable manner.

- RBI intervenes in forex markets using foreign exchange reserves to stabilise the currency.
- A weaker rupee increases imported inflation, especially in fuel and fertilisers.
- India's external vulnerability rises during global crises and oil price shocks.

Static Linkages

- Balance of Payments = Current Account + Capital Account
- Current Account includes:
 - Merchandise trade
 - Services
 - Remittances
- Persistent CAD may weaken the domestic currency.
- Forex reserves act as a buffer during external shocks.
- RBI manages exchange rate volatility through market intervention.
- Import substitution was a key feature before 1991 economic reforms.
- Economic liberalisation shifted India towards export-led growth and global integration.
- Excessive fertiliser subsidies distort nutrient balance in agriculture.
- Energy security is a critical aspect of economic security.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Reducing non-essential imports may improve CAD temporarily.
- Promotes awareness regarding external sector stability.
- Supports Atmanirbhar Bharat and domestic manufacturing.
- Encourages sustainable consumption practices.
- Reduced oil dependence improves energy security.

Concerns

- Consumption reduction may slow economic growth.
- Lower demand can discourage private investment.
- India cannot rapidly replace imported crude oil and fertiliser inputs.
- Excessive protectionism may reduce competitiveness.
- Reduced fertiliser usage without alternatives may impact productivity.
- Import compression alone is not a sustainable long-term strategy.

Way Forward

- Increase export competitiveness through manufacturing reforms.
- Diversify energy basket towards renewables and green hydrogen.
- Promote domestic production of edible oils and fertilisers.
- Improve ease of doing business to attract investments.
- Focus on productivity-led growth instead of consumption compression.
- Rationalise fertiliser subsidies for balanced nutrient use.
- Strengthen logistics and infrastructure to support exports.
- Expand strategic petroleum reserves and forex buffers.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged citizens to reduce imports and conserve foreign exchange reserves amid rising geopolitical tensions in West Asia.
- Suggestions included:
 - Reducing gold purchases
 - Working from home to save fuel
 - Lowering edible oil consumption
 - Promoting natural farming and reducing chemical fertiliser use
 - Encouraging purchase of "Made in India" goods
- The backdrop is concern over:
 - Rising crude oil prices
 - Pressure on India's external sector
 - Rupee depreciation
 - Weakening Balance of Payments (BoP) position

Key Points

- India imports large quantities of:
 - Crude oil
 - Gold
 - Edible oils
 - Fertilisers
- Higher imports increase demand for dollars and widen the Current Account Deficit (CAD).
- India finances CAD through:
 - Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
 - Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI)
 - External borrowings
- Weak capital inflows can create BoP stress and pressure on the rupee.

Government, oil companies can't absorb energy shock indefinitely

FOR DECADES, the global energy economy has functioned on the tacit assumption that the Strait of Hormuz would always remain open. This assumption has been fundamentally shaken this year.

The disruption has been without precedent. The 1974 Arab oil embargo endured for five months but never resulted in the closure of the strait. During the tanker war phase of the 1980s Iran-Iraq conflict, shipping traffic was constrained, though not completely interrupted. Likewise, the 2009 drone attacks on Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq oil facility caused only a temporary disruption before supplies stabilised. In all these earlier episodes, the shock to global energy markets lasted only a short time. The present crisis, however, has extended well beyond two months and is increasingly apparent as being disruptive without immediate resolution.

For India, the exposure has been severe, with a significant share of crude oil imports and LPG and LNG volumes transiting through the strait. Within eight days of the disruption, the government issued the LPG Control Order. Refineries were directed to maximise LPG yields to meet domestic demand, despite such production being uneconomical under normal circumstances. LPG production was increased from 36,000 MT to 54,000 MT per day. On the demand side, priority was accorded to protecting supplies for domestic consumers. Similarly, in the natural gas sector, domestic PNG and transportation CNG were prioritised. Export duties were imposed to protect supplies to the domestic market.

Over the past two months, global crude

oil prices have risen by 80-100 per cent, topping \$20 at times, with product prices also increasing sharply. Yet on petrol and diesel sold through retail outlets, these increases have not, so far, been passed on to domestic consumers. Instead, the exchequer has absorbed the burden through reductions in duties and through oil marketing companies (OMCs) bearing losses. The depreciation in the rupee-dollar exchange rate has only aggravated the challenge.

The crisis could have been far more crippling had India not significantly expanded its energy infrastructure over the past decade. LPG import terminals have increased from 11 to 22. LPG pipeline infrastructure from 2,211 km to 6,242 km, strategic crude reserves from zero to 5.33 MMT, and refining capacity from 25 MMT to 258 MMT. Ethanol blending, too, has risen from 1.53 per cent to 20 per cent, reportedly saving the exchequer more than Rs 1.5 lakh crore. In addition, the refineries are operating above 100 per cent capacity utilisation to meet the increased demand.

The surge in energy prices has affected consumers worldwide. Most European and East Asian economies have increased retail fuel prices by 25-50 per cent. Several countries in India's neighbourhood have resorted to fuel rationing, reduced work weeks, austerity measures, or have faced severe shortages. In contrast, Indian consumers have, by and large, been shielded from steep price increases, while supplies have been largely uninterrupted and free from major restrictions.



B ASHOK

This protection for consumers has been real, but it has not come without a cost. The obvious question is whether such a model is sustainable. The answer is clearly no. Neither the government nor the oil companies can indefinitely absorb such financial stress.

Fifteen major oil and gas companies together contribute approximately Rs 54,000 crore to the government by way of taxes, duties, and other levies. Of this, Rs 25,504 crore accrues to state governments, largely through VAT on petrol, diesel and ATF. Based on excise duty reductions alone, the government is estimated to lose nearly Rs 460 crore per day — translating to almost Rs 1,68,000 crore annually.

There is also a widespread perception that oil companies make windfall profits whenever crude prices decline, while retail fuel prices remain unchanged. However, data published by FPAC shows that the three major OMCs together earned a post-tax profit of Rs 33,600 crore on revenues of Rs 18,20,877 crore in 2024-25 — a return of only 1.85 per cent, when the Indian basket of crude averaged \$74 per barrel. By comparison, returns during 2022-23 (average crude price of \$93.2 per barrel) and 2023-24 (\$82.6 per barrel) were 0.6 per cent and 1.4 per cent respectively, the latter being an exceptional year. Even in 2019-20, prior to the pandemic, when crude averaged \$65.5 per barrel, returns stood at just 0.56 per cent.

The capital expenditure of the three OMCs stood at Rs 72,000 crore in 2024-25, compared to Rs 64,350 crore and Rs 64,409 crore in the preceding two years. The indus-

try operates on the principle of creating and enhancing supply infrastructure ahead of demand. This approach has largely ensured the uninterrupted availability of petroleum products even during periods of severe disruption, including times of natural calamities. LPG supplies during Covid are a recent example. The trend has to continue if the energy needs of a growing economy are to be met in the years ahead. These investments also extend to emerging energy options in the ongoing energy transition, besides planned expansion of storage capacities in view of evolving geopolitical realities.

Between March 16 and April 30, the total loss suffered due to prices being maintained is estimated at around Rs 62,000 crore. Of this, the GoI has suffered a loss of around Rs 30,000 crore due to excise duty reduction and the OMCs have borne the rest.

Given the strategic importance of this sector, the companies must continue to function efficiently and generate adequate resources. The sector cannot afford to bleed indefinitely or with companies ending up with weak balance sheets. If the conflict persists, difficult decisions may become unavoidable, with every stakeholder required to bear a part of the burden until the crisis passes. The GoI, state governments, and consumers

are largely shielded from the shock of the preceding two years. The indus-

The writer is former chairman, Indian Oil Corporation Ltd

- Strategic reserves are used during emergencies and supply shocks.
- Import dependence increases external sector vulnerability.
- Inflation caused by imported commodities is called imported inflation.
- Diversification of energy sources reduces geopolitical risks.
- Biofuels support energy transition and environmental sustainability.
- Fuel taxation is an important revenue source for both Union and State governments.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Highlights India's vulnerability to external energy shocks.
- Demonstrates importance of strategic petroleum reserves.
- Shows need for long-term energy diversification.

Challenges

- High dependence on imported crude oil.
- Fiscal burden due to fuel subsidies and excise cuts.
- Stress on Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs).
- Rising inflation and external sector pressure.

Concerns

- Prolonged geopolitical instability may disrupt economic growth.
- Dependence on fossil fuels conflicts with climate commitments.
- Limited domestic crude production reduces energy resilience.

Way Forward

- Diversify crude import sources.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Accelerate renewable energy transition.
- Promote ethanol blending and biofuels.
- Increase domestic exploration and production.
- Strengthen maritime security cooperation.
- Encourage electric mobility and energy efficiency.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia have disrupted shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global oil transit route.
- The prolonged disruption has raised concerns regarding global energy security and fuel prices.
- India, dependent on crude oil imports, faces risks related to energy supply, inflation, fiscal burden, and current account deficit.
- The government increased LPG production, prioritised domestic supply, and reduced excise duties to shield consumers.

Key Points

- Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most important oil chokepoints.
- India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil requirement.
- LPG production reportedly increased from 36,000 MT/day to 54,000 MT/day during the crisis.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) in India stand at about 5.33 MMT.
- Ethanol blending increased to 20%, reducing dependence on imported crude.
- Excise duty reductions and OMC losses helped prevent steep domestic fuel price hikes.
- Rising oil prices can increase:
 - Inflation
 - Fiscal deficit
 - Current account deficit
 - Rupee depreciation

Static Linkages

- Energy security is essential for economic sovereignty.
- Maritime chokepoints influence global trade and strategic stability.

When women enter the legislature, the agenda changes



SHWETA BANSAL

THE NARI Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, and the legislative moves now associated with it, ask India: Who gets to sit in the rooms where the country makes its most consequential decisions? The proposal is simple: Reserve one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies for women. This is a structural intervention in a political order that has treated male dominance as natural. Women form nearly half the population, yet they have hovered around 14 per cent in the Lok Sabha, with even weaker representation in many states. They largely remain outside the institutions that decide on labour, violence, health, land, welfare, and economic policy.

The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 has not passed muster in Parliament. But the Prime Minister's renewed push has reopened a central question: Should India continue to wait for perfect conditions before correcting a deep democratic imbalance?

The answer is a firm no. Concerns around delimitation and federal balance deserve attention. Any redrawing of seats can sharpen anxieties between regions. These risks should be managed, not used as excuses for indefinite delay. A country of 1.4 billion people cannot keep treating women's political exclusion as a technical inconvenience. Delimitation may carry costs, but so does postponement. India has already paid the price for generations.

The pandemic exposed how unevenly crisis falls on women. Women lost jobs disproportionately, absorbed more unpaid care work, and faced rising violence behind closed doors. Climate stress, agrarian distress, education gaps, public health, nutrition, migration, and informal labour all demand perspectives that male-dominated legislatures have too often ignored.

India already has experience with women's reservation in panchayats, where one-third, and in many states nearly half, of the seats have been reserved for women since the 1990s. Women sarpanchs have often prioritised water, sanitation, schools, nutrition, roads, and local accountability. Their presence has not solved every problem. Proxy politics, caste hierarchies,

and patriarchal control persist. But it shows that when women enter institutions in meaningful numbers, the agenda changes.

International experiences show both the promise and the limits of quotas. Rwanda, after the 1994 genocide, used constitutional quotas to increase women's representation dramatically. Women legislators helped advance laws on gender-based violence and land rights. Yet questions remained about party control, elite networks, and whether all women, especially the most marginalised, gained meaningful power. Many Nordic countries used voluntary party measures to drive up women's representation. Their parliaments have shaped policies on parental leave, work-life balance, and equity. Still, even these countries have not escaped sexist political cultures, harassment, informal exclusion, etc. New Zealand and Germany tell a similar story. Representation did not dilute merit. It expanded the understanding of merit. But numbers alone did not dissolve imbalances.

India should learn from these. Quotas must come with stronger inner-party democracy, fairer candidate selection, campaign finance reform, and pathways for women from marginalised communities.

The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam's 15-year sunset clause also invites review. This is appropriate. Any major democratic reform should be judged by what it achieves, who it includes, and how it changes political practice. A critical mass of women can change the culture of Parliament, the priorities of parties, and the expectations of voters. Their voices may not be heard clearly at first. There may be familial, party, and institutional constraints. But over time, it can shift the boundaries of the possible.

India should debate delimitation, federal balance, sub-quotas, rotation, and implementation. But it should also recognise that women have waited for decades. It's time they entered legislatures as co-authors of the republic. A Parliament that looks more like India will make democracy more honest.

The writer is an IFS officer. Views are personal

- India already has women's reservation in:
 - Panchayats,
 - Urban local bodies.
- Several states provide:
 - 50% reservation in local bodies.
- Global examples:
 - Rwanda – constitutional quota model,
 - Nordic countries – party quota model.

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 15(3) – Special provisions for women and children.
- Article 16 – Equality of opportunity.
- Article 39(a) – Equal right to livelihood.
- 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act.
- 74th Constitutional Amendment Act.
- Delimitation Commission.
- Universal Adult Franchise.
- Representative democracy.
- Substantive equality.
- Participative governance.
- Gender budgeting.
- SDG 5 – Gender Equality.
- CEDAW commitments.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Improves political inclusion of women.
- Enhances democratic legitimacy.
- Brings gender perspective into policymaking.
- Strengthens participatory democracy.
- Experience from Panchayats shows better focus on:
 - Health,
 - Nutrition,
 - Education,
 - Water and sanitation.

Challenges

- Implementation dependent on delimitation.
- Rotation may reduce accountability.
- Risk of proxy representation.
- Lack of inner-party democracy.
- Debate over OBC sub-quota.
- Numerical representation may not ensure substantive empowerment.

Constitutional Dimension

- Based on principle of substantive equality.
- Supported by Article 15(3).
- Balances equality with affirmative action.

Way Forward

- Time-bound implementation after delimitation.
- Strengthen political training for women leaders.
- Ensure internal party reforms.
- Improve campaign finance access for women.
- Consider intersectional representation.
- Strengthen institutional safeguards against proxy politics.
- Promote gender-sensitive legislative functioning.

A critical mass of women can change the culture of Parliament, the priorities of parties, and the expectations of voters. Over time, it can shift the boundaries of the possible

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Renewed debate on implementation of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam for reservation of women in legislatures.
- Proposal aims to reserve 33% seats in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women.
- Women's representation in Lok Sabha remains around 14–15%, lower than global averages in many democracies.
- Implementation linked with:
 - Census,
 - Delimitation exercise.
- Debate includes issues of:
 - Federal balance,
 - Political inclusion,
 - Substantive democracy,
 - Gender justice.

Key Points

- Reservation applicable to:
 - Lok Sabha,
 - State Assemblies,
 - SC/ST reserved seats.
- Reservation to operate through rotation of constituencies.
- Proposed validity:
 - 15 years from commencement.

Most important AI lesson must be taught at home



SUTIRTH DEY

ON APRIL 1, the Union Education Minister launched the new CBSE curriculum on computational thinking and artificial intelligence for students of Classes III to VIII. The rollout is among the most ambitious school AI programmes anywhere in the world. There is no plan, however, for how those children will use AI. Consider the chatbot on a child's phone at nine in the evening, sitting beside a half-finished assignment. No syllabus reaches that.

A recent study by the Salaam Bombay Foundation and NMIMS surveyed 1,050 Class IX students across 20 Mumbai municipal schools. More than 70 per cent reported using ChatGPT, mostly for maths problems, translations, and homework. The study also found early signs of cognitive offloading: Letting a tool do our mental tasks. We all do this; the worry is when a child does it before learning how to think. In a 2025 study, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School tracked nearly 1,000 Turkish high-school maths students who were given AI tools during practice. They found that those given unrestricted AI access scored 48 per cent better than peers who studied without it. But when AI was withdrawn, those who had used it did 17 per cent worse than peers who had never used it.

The case against AI in education is narrower than these numbers suggest. A college student of mine struggles with English. He uses AI to re-explain the class notes in the language he thinks in. The same tool that hollows out one student's learning can open another's. Which way it goes depends on the student's judgement. No policy can teach that. Whether a child reaches for the chatbot to understand or to outsource depends on what the school demands and what the household rewards. The former is outside a parent's control. The latter is not. If the expectation at home is highest marks in every subject, an overloaded child will likely search for shortcuts. Schools that reward high marks share the blame. But parents have a larger stake in how their children turn out, and must move first. What does that mean in practice?

Take the child into confidence. The cost of letting the chatbot do their thinking is real, and most children can absorb this if an adult explains it. They would love to think for themselves; they outsource because, in the moment, the alternative is harder. Then recalibrate. When your child reports a mark, ask how they got it. If the work was their own, praise it and let the mark be whatever it is. If the work was the chatbot's, say so, and withhold praise. None of this works without your own AI literacy. The point is not catching the chatbot in your child's homework but knowing these tools well enough to ask sharp questions about their process.

The new curriculum will teach Indian children how AI works. Knowing when to set the chatbot aside is a lesson the school cannot give. That lesson is given at home, in a hundred small conversations about what learning is, and what is beneficial in the long run. The parent who asks the child, after every assignment, to explain the work back, or try it once with the screen closed, is giving them something AI cannot: The slow muscle of working things out, and the joy of arriving there themselves.

The writer is chair, AI committee, and professor of Biology, IISER Pune. Views are personal

Whether a child reaches for the chatbot to understand or to outsource depends on what the school demands and what the household rewards. The former is outside a parent's control. The latter is not

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Union Education Ministry launched AI and coding exposure initiatives for Classes III–VIII.
- The initiative aligns with implementation of NEP 2020 and digital learning reforms.
- Concerns emerged regarding excessive dependence of students on AI tools such as ChatGPT for homework and assignments.
- Mumbai-based survey by Salaam Bombay Foundation and NMIMS:
 - Over 70% of surveyed Class IX students used AI tools.
 - Major uses: mathematics solving, translation, homework assistance.
- International research highlighted risk of “cognitive offloading” due to unrestricted AI dependence.

Key Points

- AI integration in school education is expanding rapidly.
- AI can support:
 - Personalized learning,
 - Language assistance,
 - Accessibility,
 - Faster conceptual clarification.
- Major concerns:
 - Decline in critical thinking,
 - Reduced analytical ability,
 - Dependence on AI-generated answers,
 - Ethical issues in assessments.

- Education experts emphasize:
 - Responsible AI usage,
 - Human-centered learning,
 - Role of parents and teachers in monitoring usage.
- AI literacy is becoming an important component of future-ready education.

Static Linkages

- Scientific temper and spirit of inquiry.
- Child-centric and experiential learning.
- Digital literacy and human capital development.
- Ethical use of technology.
- Role of family and socialization in education.
- Inclusive education and equitable access.
- Critical thinking and conceptual learning.
- Technology as a tool, not substitute for human reasoning.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Improves accessibility and personalized learning.
- Helps bridge language barriers.
- Enhances digital readiness of students.
- Supports self-paced learning.

Challenges

- Cognitive offloading weakens independent thinking.
- Overdependence reduces creativity and analytical skills.
- Risk of academic dishonesty and plagiarism.
- Digital divide may widen educational inequalities.
- Lack of regulatory framework for AI usage in schools.

Stakeholders

Government

- Promote innovation while ensuring ethical safeguards.

Schools

- Redesign assessments toward conceptual understanding.

Parents

- Encourage responsible and balanced AI use.

Students

- Use AI as learning aid, not replacement for thinking.

Way Forward

- Develop national guidelines for AI use in education.
- Integrate AI ethics and digital responsibility into curriculum.
- Shift from rote-learning to competency-based assessments.
- Increase teacher training in AI-enabled pedagogy.
- Encourage critical thinking and experiential learning.
- Promote balanced AI-assisted learning models.
- Strengthen digital literacy among parents and teachers.