



# **DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS**

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**CIVILS WITH AKASH  
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

# India, U.S. draw up deal on rare earth elements

Framework follows growing concerns over China's export controls of strategic metals; Australia, Japan join fellow Quad members in separate framework among the grouping on critical minerals

Kallol Bhattacharjee  
NEW DELHI

**I**n the sidelines of the 11th Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM), India and the United States on Tuesday firmed up an important framework for cooperation in ensuring steady supplies of critical minerals, in a move that follows growing concerns over China's export controls of rare earth minerals and strategic metals vital for technology supply chains.

"The Framework aims to deepen India-U.S. cooperation across the critical minerals and rare earths supply chain, including mining, processing, recycling and related investments. It seeks to strengthen resilient and diversified supply chains, while promoting collaboration in financing and effective management of critical minerals and rare earths scrap," said an announcement on the "Framework" titled "Securing of supply in the mining and processing of critical minerals and rare earths".

The understanding between India and the U.S. has been under consideration at least since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Washington in February 2025, when secure supply routes for critical minerals were considered a "shared strategic priority," said a official press note.

A separate framework on critical minerals was al-

## Rare deal

The framework comes amid shortfall of critical metals in global markets after China imposed export curbs on rare earth elements.



**Mining strategy:** The agreement follows continued India-U.S. engagements, including India becoming a signatory to the U.S.-led Pax Silica initiative, *seminis*

so signed among the four Quad nations – Australia, India, Japan, and the United States – which aims at mobilising around \$20 billion in government and private-sector support to establish stable supply chains for critical minerals.

The initiatives aim at dealing with the shortfall of critical metals in global markets that intensified after China imposed export controls on rare earth elements in 2025, after the U.S.'s imposition of tariffs on a large number of partner countries.

**'\$30-billion projects'**  
The India-U.S. deal was built upon continued engagements between the two countries, including India becoming a signatory to the U.S.-led Pax Silica initiative on February 20, 2026.

A statement issued by the U.S. Embassy said the United States is "mobilising unprecedented resources to secure critical supply chains, supporting projects with more than \$30 billion in letters of interest, investments, loans and other support in partnership with the private sector".

"These coordinated efforts span domestic and international projects, strengthening U.S. national security and economic competitiveness," the statement said.

The Quad Critical Minerals Initiative Framework will help in nurturing projects on critical minerals that are located in 'Quad partner countries' and are 'operated by companies headquartered in Quad partner countries', thereby plugging supply chain

gaps in critical minerals. Both the India-U.S. and Quad-level frameworks are expected to allow for greater alignment and harmonisation of domestic laws and regulations to facilitate easier access to the supply chain. These agreements are also expected to help partner countries to tighten controls to deal with national security requirements.

"Quad partners intend to work together to improve the recovery and use of critical minerals from e-waste and other scrap materials to enhance the supply chain and promote recycling of contained critical minerals within Quad partner and like-minded countries," said a statement.

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- U.S. announced support exceeding \$30 billion for critical mineral projects globally.

## Static Linkages

- Critical minerals are essential for:
  - EV batteries
  - Solar panels
  - Wind turbines
  - Semiconductors
  - Defence equipment
- Rare Earth Elements (REEs):
  - Group of 17 elements including lanthanides, scandium, yttrium.
- India has rare earth reserves in:
  - Kerala
  - Tamil Nadu
  - Odisha
  - Andhra Pradesh
- Monazite sands contain rare earth minerals.
- India launched:
  - National Critical Mineral Mission
  - KABIL (Khanij Bidesh India Ltd.) for overseas mineral acquisition.
- India is import-dependent for:
  - Lithium
  - Cobalt
  - Nickel
- E-Waste Management Rules promote recycling of strategic minerals.
- International Energy Agency (IEA) projects sharp rise in demand for lithium and rare earths due to energy transition.

## Critical Analysis

### Significance

- Reduces overdependence on China.
- Strengthens India's energy and economic security.
- Supports Make in India and clean energy goals.
- Enhances resilience of semiconductor and EV industries.
- Promotes trusted supply chains among Quad countries.

### Challenges

- India lacks advanced refining technology.
- Environmental concerns related to mining.
- High investment requirement.
- Geopolitical competition over strategic resources.
- Supply chains remain vulnerable to global disruptions.

## Way Forward

- Expand domestic exploration and processing capacity.
- Develop strategic mineral reserves.
- Promote recycling and circular economy.
- Strengthen overseas mineral partnerships through KABIL.
- Increase R&D in battery technology and substitutes.
- Ensure sustainable mining practices.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- India and the U.S. signed a framework for cooperation on critical minerals and rare earth supply chains during the 11th Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting.
- Quad countries (India, U.S., Japan, Australia) also launched the Quad Critical Minerals Initiative.
- The initiative comes after China imposed export controls on rare earth elements and strategic metals in 2025.
- Aim: Build resilient and diversified supply chains for critical minerals required for advanced technologies and clean energy transition.

### Key Points

- Framework covers:
  - Mining
  - Processing
  - Recycling
  - Investment cooperation
  - Supply-chain resilience
- Quad initiative plans to mobilize around \$20 billion in public and private investment.
- Focus on reducing dependence on China-dominated mineral supply chains.
- Cooperation includes recovery of minerals from:
  - E-waste
  - Industrial scrap
- India joined the U.S.-led Pax Silica initiative in 2026.

# Quad announces maritime plans amid Hormuz crisis

Kalol Bhattacharjee  
NEW DELHI

Responding to the challenges emanating from the conflict-hit Persian Gulf and the tensions in the South China Sea, the Quad grouping on Tuesday pledged to enhance cooperation in the maritime and energy domains.

At the 11th Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM), External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his counterparts from Australia, Japan, and the United States launched initiatives on energy security, as well as on maritime surveillance and domain awareness to aid in emergency operations and humanitarian responses at sea.

"On the issue of maritime security, there are two big announcements. The first is the launch of the Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration initiative, which is going to leverage each of our country's maritime surveillance capabilities in the Indo-Pacific to enhance information sharing," U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said at a press conference on the lawns of Hyderabad House, where he was joined by Mr. Jaishankar, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, and Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong.

**Freedom of navigation**  
The second, he said, is the "expansion of the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness initiative which can provide near real-time commercial maritime domain awareness data to countries throughout the Indo-Pacific region".

The immediate context



Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar with visiting Quad Foreign Ministers after the meeting on Tuesday, 5/25/21, SUMATRA, INDONESIA

of these two initiatives found prominent mention in the joint statement issued at the end of the meeting, which insisted on freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz and the South China Sea.

Mr. Rubio also announced that India will host the "next iteration of the Quad at Sea mission, which will bring together our respective Coast Guards in one place and one ship".

Iranian Foreign Minister Seyyed Abbas Araghchi had said, while visiting New Delhi earlier this month, that the Strait of Hormuz is not part of any international waterway and as a result, Iran has no obligation to comply with the UNCLOS (UN Convention on the Law of the Sea).

The Quad joint statement contradicted the Iranian claim, and condemned "attacks on commercial shipping vessels. It called for adherence to the UNCLOS in both the Strait of Hormuz and also the Red Sea where the Iran-backed Houthi militia continues to pose a threat to western shipping, especially against the backdrop

of the U.S.-Israel military campaign against Iran that started on February 28.

The grouping also announced the Quad Initiative on Indo-Pacific Energy Security to boost regional energy resilience and emergency response exercises.

**Maritime commerce**  
Mr. Jaishankar also hinted at concerns over the continuing chokehold in the Strait of Hormuz and emphasised the need for "safe and unimpeded maritime commerce". Referring to the growing collaboration in areas such as surveillance and domain awareness, logistics networks, and undersea cables, he said, "We will be continuing to deepen these areas in the times to come."

Officials clarified that these initiatives were not aimed at any other regional powers. Later in the day, however, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning, in an address, reiterated China's opposition to the "creation of exclusive small cliques".

QUESTIONS ON FUTURE  
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## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- At the 11th Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi, India, U.S., Japan, and Australia launched initiatives on:
  - Maritime surveillance
  - Maritime domain awareness
  - Indo-Pacific energy security
- Background:
  - South China Sea tensions
  - Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea instability
  - Threats to global shipping routes
- Quad reaffirmed:
  - Freedom of navigation
  - UNCLOS-based maritime order
  - Safe maritime commerce

### Key Points

#### Maritime Initiatives

- Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration Improves maritime information-sharing.
- IPMDA Expansion Near real-time maritime tracking.
- Monitors illegal fishing, piracy, and grey-zone activities.
- Quad at Sea Mission India to host next Coast Guard exercise.
- Focus on HADR and maritime coordination.

#### Energy Security

- Quad Indo-Pacific Energy Security Initiative Strengthens energy resilience and emergency response.

#### Strategic Concerns

- Quad stressed UNCLOS compliance in:
  - Strait of Hormuz
  - South China Sea
  - Red Sea
- Condemned attacks on commercial shipping.

#### China Factor

- China termed Quad an "exclusive grouping".
- Concerns over Chinese assertiveness in Indo-Pacific.

#### Summit Issue

- No announcement on next Quad Summit.
- Suggests greater ministerial-level engagement.

#### Static Linkages

- UNCLOS = "Constitution of Oceans".
- Strait of Hormuz is a major energy chokepoint.
- South China Sea is vital for global trade.
- EEZ extends up to 200 nautical miles.
- Transit passage applies to international straits.
- SAGAR emphasizes maritime cooperation.
- SLOCs are critical for India's trade and energy security.

#### Critical Analysis

##### Significance

- Strengthens Indo-Pacific maritime security.
- Improves surveillance and coordination.
- Protects shipping and energy routes.
- Reinforces rules-based order.

##### Challenges

- May intensify U.S.-China rivalry.
- Quad lacks formal institutional structure.
- Different priorities among members.
- Uncertainty over Summit-level meetings.

##### India's Interest

- Secures energy imports.
- Protects sea trade routes.
- Enhances Indo-Pacific strategic role.

#### Way Forward

- Institutionalize Quad cooperation.
- Expand maritime capacity-building.
- Improve cooperation on:
  - Cyber security
  - Undersea cables
  - Disaster relief
- Promote peaceful dispute resolution under UNCLOS.
- Balance strategic autonomy with partnerships.

# Panel set up to study 'demographic change' due to illegal immigration

Vijaita Singh  
NEW DELHI

The Centre has constituted a high-level committee to "study the demographic changes arising from illegal immigration and other abnormal reasons", Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday.

The committee, which was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 15, 2025, will also recommend an appropriate institutional mechanism for "population stabilisation", according to the terms of reference. "Illegal infiltration and other reasons leading to unnatural demographic change are a very big challenge for the present and future of any nation," Mr. Shah said in a post on X while announcing the formation of the committee.

## One year's time

The panel, headed by retired Supreme Court judge Prakash Prabhakar Navlekar, 83, has been directed to submit its report within



a year, and if necessary, its tenure could be extended by up to six months, the Ministry of Home Affairs said.

The committee has also been tasked with recommending a streamlined and permanent operational mechanism for the legal, fair, and time-bound identification, detention, and deportation of illegal immigrants residing in the country.

The committee will also comprise the Census Commissioner, retired IAS officer Durga Shanker Mishra, retired IPS officer Balaji Srivastava (Retired IPS) and

Dr. Shamika Ravi, who is part of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council. The Joint Secretary (Foreigners-I) in the Ministry of Home Affairs will be the Member Secretary of the Committee.

The Union Home Minister, in his post on X, stated that demographic change is a serious problem linked not only to sovereignty but also to national security, law and order, major changes in social structure, and the protection of tribal societies. "This committee will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the demographic changes occur-

ring across India due to illegal immigration and other abnormal reasons. It will analyse patterns of abnormal population changes at the level of religious and social communities and will present a well-planned and time-bound solution to address the issue," Mr. Shah said.

## Fall in birth rate

The last population census was conducted in the country in 2011, and the next Census exercise, which is ongoing, is scheduled to be completed in 2027.

The latest Sample Registration System (SRS) report for 2024 shows that India's birth rate fell from 21 in 2014 to 18.3 in 2024. According to the National Family Health Survey-V, published in 2022, the country's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) – an average number of children per woman – dropped to 2, lower than the replacement level of 2.1. The SRS covered a population of 89.81 lakh.

## Members

- Census Commissioner
- Durga Shanker Mishra (Retd. IAS)
- Balaji Srivastava (Retd. IPS)
- Dr. Shamika Ravi

## Static Linkages

- Articles 5–11: Citizenship provisions
- Citizenship Act, 1955
- Foreigners Act, 1946
- Census Act, 1948
- Article 355:
  - Duty of Union to protect States against external aggression/internal disturbance
- Assam Accord, 1985:
  - Cut-off date for illegal migrants in Assam: March 24, 1971
- Replacement level fertility:
  - TFR of 2.1
- Demographic Transition Theory:
  - Shift from high birth/death rates to low birth/death rates

## Critical Analysis

### Significance

- Helps assess demographic impact of illegal immigration.
- Strengthens border and internal security framework.
- May improve coordination on identification/deportation.

### Concerns

- Risk of communal polarisation.
- Human rights concerns during detention/deportation.
- Lack of updated Census data.
- Administrative difficulties in identifying undocumented migrants.

## Way Forward

- Early completion of Census.
- Strengthen border surveillance.
- Transparent identification process.
- Ensure due process under Article 21.
- Better Centre–State coordination.
- Develop refugee/asylum framework.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- Centre constituted a high-level committee to study demographic changes caused by illegal immigration and other "abnormal reasons".
- Announced by PM Narendra Modi on August 15, 2025.
- Union Home Minister Amit Shah termed demographic change a challenge to:
  - National security
  - Sovereignty
  - Law and order
  - Tribal protection
- Committee headed by retired Supreme Court judge Justice Prakash Prabhakar Navlekar.
- Report to be submitted within 1 year.

## Key Points

### Committee Mandate

- Study demographic changes due to:
  - Illegal immigration
  - Other abnormal demographic factors
- Recommend:
  - Population stabilisation mechanism
  - Institutional framework for:
    - Identification
    - Detention
    - Deportation of illegal immigrants

### Important Data

- Last Census: 2011
- Next Census likely completion: 2027
- SRS 2024:
  - Birth rate declined from 21 (2014) → 18.3 (2024)
- NFHS-5:
  - India's TFR = 2.0
  - Below replacement level (2.1)

# SC ruled resignation doesn't vaporise taint of defection

## NEWS ANALYSIS

K. Venkataraman

A question has been raised in Tamil Nadu as to whether the Speaker can accept the resignation of MLAs while petitions for disqualifying them are pending.

The Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker, J.C.D. Prabhakar, has accepted the resignation of four legislators elected as AIADMK candidates. They have all joined the ruling Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) after their resignations were accepted. The members were part of a group of 25 AIADMK MLAs who voted in favour of the TVK government in the confidence motion.

The AIADMK leadership had earlier sought their disqualification for violating the party's direction to oppose the motion. However, the acceptance of

their resignations may have rendered the disqualification proceedings against them infructuous. Against this backdrop, the AIADMK has appealed to the Speaker to take back the acceptance of their resignations and adjudicate the petitions for their disqualification.

An answer to the main question may be inferred from the judgment of the Supreme Court in 2019 in *Shrimanth Balasaheb Patel and Others vs. Speaker, Karnataka Assembly*. In an apparent bid to topple the Janata Dal(S)-Congress coalition government, a group of MLAs seemed to have acted against the Congress's directions and avoided party meetings and Assembly sittings. On realising that they may be disqualified under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution for "voluntarily giving up the membership of their party", many of

## A 2019 ruling by the Supreme Court sheds emphasis on the issue roiling Tamil Nadu politics

them submitted their resignations, but the then Speaker of the Karnataka Assembly did not accept their decision to quit immediately. Subsequently, many of them were disqualified.

In a judgment that upheld their disqualification, but set aside the Speaker's order declaring that they would remain disqualified for the remainder of the Assembly's term, the top court gave three conclusions relevant to the question arising today. First, the Speaker's role in considering a resignation was limited. The authority could only ascertain if the resignation is "voluntary" (out of one's

free will, and not under duress) and "genuine" (authentic). Beyond this, he cannot delve into motive. "Once it is demonstrated that a member is willing to resign out of his free will, the Speaker has no option but to accept the resignation." The court further said: "It is constitutionally impermissible for the Speaker to take into account any extraneous factors while considering the resignation. The satisfaction of the Speaker is subject to judicial review."

However, it made a second point. The taint of disqualification does not "vaporise" just because a member submitted his resignation prior to adjudication. The court reasoned that defection related back to the date when a member incurred disqualification, and the submission of a resignation letter does not render a pending or impending disqualification

action infructuous. The court noted that there is a second consequence to defection, apart from loss of membership. It is the provision in the Constitution barring a disqualified member from holding a Minister's post or any remunerative political office until the end of the term or until the person is re-elected to office, whichever is earlier.

This means no member can join a Ministry formed by defection without facing an election or byelection. (This prospect was real in the Karnataka case in 2019, as the defectors were likely keen on joining an alternative government). As such a possibility exists, the fate of a person facing disqualification may hinge on whether the Speaker accepts a resignation or not. The court also declined to go into the question on the Speaker's jurisdiction to deal with a

disqualification issue after a member has quit. The question did not arise in a strict sense in that case because the act that amounted to defection occurred prior to their resignation, and the court did not want to decide a question of law that did not arise.

A harmonised reading of these conclusions gives a picture of how the law deals with the interplay between disqualification and resignation: the Speaker may disqualify a person if the defection occurred earlier, but does not mean he could reject a voluntary and genuine resignation by delving into its motive. The submission of a resignation is not a reason to close a disqualification complaint, but the acceptance of the resignation may bring it to an end. However, the Speaker's decision is still subject to judicial review. (The author is an independent journalist)

- re-election, or
- expiry of House term.

## Judicial Review

- Speaker's decisions under:
  - resignation, and
  - disqualification
  - are subject to judicial review.

## Static Linkages

- Parliamentary democracy requires party discipline.
- Presiding officer acts as constitutional authority.
- Anti-defection law aims to ensure political stability.
- Defection undermines electoral mandate.
- Judicial review is part of basic structure doctrine.
- Quasi-judicial powers exercised by Speaker.

## Critical Analysis

### Positives

- Prevents misuse of resignation process.
- Maintains party discipline.
- Judicial review acts as safeguard.
- Strengthens stability of governments.

### Challenges

- Allegations of partisan role of Speaker.
- Delay in deciding disqualification petitions.
- Resignation used to bypass anti-defection law.
- Weakens public trust in democracy.

### Constitutional Issues

- Balance between:
  - legislator's freedom, and
  - party discipline.
- Need for neutrality of Speaker's office.

## Way Forward

- Time-bound decision on disqualification petitions.
- Independent tribunal for anti-defection cases.
- Strengthen neutrality of Speaker.
- Clear legal framework on resignation-disqualification overlap.
- Electoral reforms to reduce opportunistic defections.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker accepted resignation of 4 AIADMK MLAs.
- MLAs had voted in favour of the ruling government against party direction during confidence motion.
- AIADMK sought their disqualification under the Tenth Schedule.
- Issue raised:
- Can Speaker accept resignation when disqualification petitions are pending?
- Important Supreme Court case:
- *Shrimanth Balasaheb Patel vs Speaker, Karnataka Assembly (2019)*.

### Key Points

#### Constitutional Provisions

- Article 190(3)(b):
  - MLA may resign by writing to Speaker.
  - Speaker must ensure resignation is:
    - voluntary
    - genuine
- Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law):
  - Added by 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985.
  - Disqualification if member:
    - voluntarily gives up party membership, or
    - votes against party whip.

#### Supreme Court Observations (2019)

- Speaker cannot examine political motive behind resignation.
- If resignation is voluntary and genuine, Speaker should accept it.
- Resignation does not erase earlier act of defection.
- Disqualification proceedings can continue even after resignation if defection occurred earlier.
- Disqualified member cannot become Minister until:

# India's energy strategy needs price correction

The Strait of Hormuz is no longer just a geopolitical flashpoint; it has become the fault line of the global energy economy. As tensions in West Asia continue to disrupt shipping through one of the world's most critical maritime corridors, countries across the globe are confronting a harsh reality: energy security is now inseparable from geopolitics. For India, which depends on imports for the overwhelming majority of its crude oil needs, the crisis has exposed both the strength of recent policy interventions and the limits of shielding consumers indefinitely from market realities.

The immediate impact of the conflict has been visible in global crude markets. Brent prices have surged sharply amid fears of prolonged disruption to Gulf supplies, while freight costs and marine insurance premiums have climbed to multi-year highs. Shipping routes are being diverted to the Cape of Good Hope, extending delivery timelines by weeks and significantly increasing transportation expenses. Global gas markets, too, remain under pressure following disruptions linked to the shutdown of key liquefied natural gas export infrastructure in Qatar. Despite this turbulence, the crisis has not hit Indian consumers as ferociously as it should be so far. Petrol and diesel prices at Indian fuel pumps have remained relatively stable, hovering near ₹95 per litre in many cities, even as fuel prices in several advanced economies rose steeply, by about 25% on average. Petrol prices in Germany and the United Kingdom have crossed the equivalent of roughly ₹220 and ₹204 per litre, respectively, while Hong Kong continues to record some of the world's highest fuel prices at nearly ₹250 per litre. This stability is not a coincidence. It has been achieved through an extraordinary combination of state intervention, supply diversification, and financial absorption by public sector oil companies.

**Interventions that come at a steep cost**  
Over the past few years, India has quietly built a more resilient energy architecture. The country expanded its sourcing basket beyond the Gulf, increased strategic reserves, and strengthened ties with suppliers in Russia, the United States, West Africa, and the Atlantic basin. Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri recently reiterated that India's crude supply position remains secure despite disruptions around the Strait of Hormuz, pointing to the country's growing ability to source oil from non-Gulf origins and maintain refinery throughput at high levels. Taking advantage of the exit of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, India signed an agreement with the UAE to store 30 million tons of crude oil in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve. The government's response since the latest



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escalation has been swift. Refineries were directed to maximise LPG production to meet rising domestic demand, especially given the dramatic expansion of cooking gas access under the Ujjwala scheme. LPG connections in India have risen from roughly 14.5 crore in 2014 to more than 33 crore today, fundamentally transforming household energy consumption patterns. Gas allocation was prioritised for households, public transport networks, and fertilizer plants to avoid cascading disruptions across essential sectors. Domestic LPG production was reportedly increased by nearly 50% during the peak of the crisis response, while all 25 fertilizer plants continued receiving around 70% of their gas requirements to maintain agricultural supply chains. Naval deployments in the Gulf of Oman, diplomatic engagement with multiple countries, and efforts to secure alternative shipping arrangements underline how seriously India has treated the crisis. These measures have bought the country valuable time. But they have also come at a steep cost.

**Pressures on oil firms**  
India's state-run Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) are now operating under enormous financial stress, selling fuel below market-linked costs in order to protect consumers from inflationary shocks. Mr. Puri recently indicated that under-recoveries could rise sharply if elevated crude prices persist, with some estimates placing daily losses near ₹700 crore-₹800 crore during peak volatility. The government has already reduced excise duties and imposed temporary export restrictions on refined fuels to retain supplies within the domestic market.

This strategy may be politically prudent in the short term, but is economically difficult to sustain over a prolonged period. Energy subsidies of this scale eventually strain public finances, weaken the balance sheets of oil companies, and distort market signals that encourage efficient energy consumption. The larger challenge is that India's vulnerability is structural, not temporary. Nearly every major sector of the economy – transport, logistics, aviation, manufacturing, agriculture, and fertilizers – remains heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels. Even if India succeeds in avoiding immediate shortages, it cannot remain permanently insulated from a prolonged global energy shock.

There are already signs that the government recognises this reality. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeals for responsible energy use – including reducing unnecessary travel, conserving fuel, and encouraging remote work where feasible – reflect an administration preparing the public for a period of prolonged uncertainty. Such messaging would have seemed extraordinary only a few years ago. Today, it

appears pragmatic. There is a strong argument for calibrated correction. India has managed inflation relatively effectively over the past decade compared to many major economies, creating some room for a measured increase in petroleum prices without triggering runaway inflation. Consumer Price Index inflation remained comparatively moderate in early 2026 – at around 3.2% to 3.5% through the first four months of the year – suggesting that limited price rationalisation may still be economically manageable. A gradual pass-through of global energy costs would reduce the fiscal burden on the state, stabilise oil marketing companies, and encourage more responsible consumption patterns.

For now, India has demonstrated remarkable agility in navigating one of the most serious energy disruptions in modern history. Supplies remain stable, panic has been avoided, and the government has managed to shield ordinary citizens from the worst immediate consequences.

**The realities of a new energy era**  
But energy shocks of this scale eventually demand economic realism. The true cost of fuel cannot be deferred forever. India's challenge is no longer merely surviving the crisis; it is preparing the public and the economy for a world in which energy security will remain fragile, contested, and deeply political for years to come.

Recent reports suggest that Indian refiners continue to diversify sourcing aggressively even as global analysts warn that a prolonged Hormuz disruption could widen India's fiscal deficit and weaken the rupee. That should serve as a reminder that the situation is not a temporary headline cycle. It marks the beginning of a new energy era – one in which resilience, not diversification, and conservation matter as much as diplomacy itself. The government has raised petroleum product prices several times, cumulatively by about 7%. Yet, this piecemeal approach neither matches international crude oil prices adequately nor meaningfully reduces the burden on OMCs. Reports suggest that OMCs continue to incur losses of ₹700 crore to ₹800 crore a day, and that only an additional 13% hike, beyond the existing 7%, would eliminate these losses. It has also been reported that the government has returned to adjusting fuel prices in line with fluctuations in international crude oil prices. However, frequent revisions create uncertainty for consumers trying to manage household and business budgets. Instead of incremental increases, the government should implement a one-time price hike of at least 13% on petroleum products, including petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel. Such a move, though difficult, would reduce uncertainty, stabilise OMC finances, and allow prices to remain steady until there is a significant shift in global crude prices.

- Fossil Fuel Dependence
- Maritime Chokepoints
- Subsidy Burden
- Market-linked Fuel Pricing
- Buffer Stock Mechanism
- Diversification of Energy Sources

## Critical Analysis

### Positives

- Diversified crude sourcing reduced dependence on Gulf countries.
- Strategic reserves improved crisis preparedness.
- Stable fuel prices controlled inflationary pressure.
- Strong diplomatic and naval coordination ensured supply continuity.

### Challenges

- High import dependence remains a structural weakness.
- Fuel subsidies increase fiscal burden.
- OMC financial stress may affect long-term viability.
- Prolonged crude shocks can weaken rupee and widen CAD.
- Transport, fertilizer, and aviation sectors remain oil-dependent.

## Way Forward

- Expand SPR capacity.
- Accelerate renewable energy and Green Hydrogen Mission.
- Promote EVs and ethanol blending.
- Encourage energy conservation.
- Move gradually toward transparent market-linked pricing.
- Strengthen long-term crude supply agreements.
- Enhance domestic exploration under HELP policy.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- Rising tensions in West Asia disrupted shipping through the Strait of Hormuz – a major global oil transit route.
- Brent crude prices, freight costs, and marine insurance premiums increased sharply.
- India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil needs, making it vulnerable to external energy shocks.
- Government interventions and OMC absorption prevented sharp domestic fuel price hikes.

### Key Points

- Strait of Hormuz handles nearly 20% of global oil trade.
- India diversified crude imports toward Russia, U.S., West Africa, etc.
- India-UAE agreement for crude storage in Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR).
- LPG connections increased from 14.5 crore (2014) to 33+ crore under Ujjwala Yojana.
- OMC losses estimated at ₹700–800 crore/day during peak volatility.
- CPI inflation remained around 3.2–3.5% in early 2026.
- Reports suggest additional 13% fuel price rise may be needed to offset losses.

### Static Linkages

- Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR)
- Current Account Deficit (CAD)
- Imported Inflation
- Energy Security

The petrol products price hike is too little and too late

# Rajya Sabha defections, constitutional questions

The recent developments within the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), appear to have dealt a decisive blow to its representation in the Rajya Sabha. On April 24, 2026, seven out of its 10 sitting Members of Parliament, publicly announced that over two-thirds of the party's MPs had decided to merge with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), invoking the provisions of the 10th Schedule of the Constitution.

While the development has attracted widespread political attention, its implications extend beyond immediate partisan concerns. It raises significant constitutional questions regarding the interpretation of the anti-defection law, particularly the scope of the "merger" exception under the 10th Schedule. Nor is the episode entirely unprecedented. Similar assertions of legislative strength have been witnessed at the State level, most notably in the case of the Eknath Shinde-led faction in the Shiv Sena within the Maharashtra Assembly. However, the present instance assumes greater significance as it unfolds at the national level, involving MPs in the Rajya Sabha, thereby amplifying its constitutional and political consequences.

**Anti-defection framework, "split" doctrine**  
The Constitution, as originally adopted in 1950, provided for disqualification on limited grounds under Article 103, to be decided by the President of India acting on the opinion of the Election Commission of India. The 10th Schedule, introduced by the 52nd Constitution Amendment Act, 1985, expanded this framework to address the persistent problem of political defections adding another ground for disqualification of members to be decided by the Speaker or Chairman. The objective was to curb the practice of elected representatives abandoning their parties for political gain, by attaching the consequence of disqualification. At the same time, the Schedule originally carved out two exceptions, "split" under Paragraph 3 and "merger" under Paragraph 4. The first, which recognised a split in a legislature party where one-third of its members formed a



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separate faction, was subsequently deleted by the 91st Constitution Amendment Act, 2003, following recommendations of Electoral Reforms (Dinesh Goswami Committee) in May 1990 and the 17th Law Commission Report, 1999. This deletion marked a conscious shift away from recognising internal fractures within legislative parties as a legitimate defence to defection.

The omission of Paragraph 3 carries deeper implications. The concept of "split" had implicitly recognised a degree of autonomy in the legislature party vis-à-vis the political party, its removal signals Parliament's clear intent to restore primacy to the political party as the central unit of democratic accountability.

The Supreme Court of India has also reinforced this position in *Subhash Desai vs Principal Secretary, Governor of Maharashtra (2023)*, where a Constitution Bench declined to interpret the 10th Schedule in a manner that severs the figurative umbilical cord between a legislature party and its parent political party. The Court underscored that the political party continues to guide and control the actions of its elected members, even after electoral victory.

**The merger exception in question**  
The present controversy centres on the interpretation of Paragraph 4 of the 10th Schedule, which provides immunity from disqualification in cases of merger. The key question is whether such a merger can be effected solely by two-thirds of the members of a legislature party, or whether it must necessarily be preceded by, or reflect, a decision of the original political party itself.

A plain reading of Paragraph 4 suggests that the exemption applies where the "original political party" merges with another political party. The emphasis, therefore, is on the merger of the political party, not merely a numerical alignment within the legislature party. Hence, Paragraph 4(2), which introduces a deeming fiction based on the consent of two-thirds of legislators, cannot be read in isolation so as to displace the primacy of the political organisation.

To do so would invert the constitutional design, effectively allowing the legislature party to dictate the fate of the political party.

This interpretation would be inconsistent with Parliament's decision in exercise of constituent power to abolish the "split" exception, which had earlier permitted even a one-third faction to claim legitimacy. The threshold may have changed, but the principle remains that the internal dissent within the legislature party cannot override the identity and continuity of the political party.

## Beyond technicalities

At a broader level, the anti-defection law was not merely intended to regulate individual conduct but to preserve the integrity of the party system and, by extension, the institution of "opposition" in democracy. While it does not entirely prohibit political realignments, it subjects them to constitutional discipline.

The recent AAP episode underscores the need for judicial clarity on whether legislative majorities can, in effect, appropriate the identity of the political party they were elected to represent. The answer will have far-reaching implications for parliamentary democracy.

As lyricist and former parliamentarian Javed Akhtar once observed in the Rajya Sabha, the essential distinction between democracy and dictatorship lies in the presence of an opposition. It is this opposition that the 10th Schedule seeks to safeguard. AAP has approached the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha under Paragraph 6 of the 10th Schedule to challenge the action of its seven "merger" MPs.

How the merger exception is ultimately interpreted will be significant, particularly for the continued vitality of the Opposition. In the absence of settled judicial clarity, the issue is likely, sooner rather than later, to invite authoritative determination by the Supreme Court. The hope, ultimately, is that constitutional adjudication will preserve the centrality of political parties within India's parliamentary framework.

## Static Linkages

- Parliamentary democracy requires strong opposition.
- Political parties are central to representative democracy.
- Speaker/Chairman acts as tribunal under 10th Schedule.
- Judicial review allowed in *Kihoto Hollohan Case (1992)*.
- Constitutional morality and party discipline must be balanced.
- Defections weaken electoral mandate.

## Critical Analysis

### Positives

- Prevents instability in governments.
- Reduces corruption and horse-trading.
- Protects party-based democracy.

### Concerns

- Reduces legislators' freedom of expression.
- Speaker's role often seen as partisan.
- Merger provision can be misused for mass defections.
- Weakens opposition in Parliament.

## Way Forward

- Time-bound decision on disqualification petitions.
- Independent tribunal for anti-defection cases.
- Clarify distinction between political party and legislature party.
- Limit whip to confidence and money bills.
- Strengthen inner-party democracy.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- 7 out of 10 Rajya Sabha MPs of AAP announced merger with BJP by invoking Paragraph 4 of the 10th Schedule.
- Issue raises constitutional question on validity of "merger" under Anti-Defection Law.
- Similar issue earlier emerged in Maharashtra Shiv Sena split case.
- Matter concerns role of political parties, legislature parties, and parliamentary opposition.

### Key Points

- Anti-defection law added through:
  - 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985
  - Added 10th Schedule.
- Objective:
  - Prevent political defections and horse-trading.
  - Ensure stability of governments.
- Grounds of disqualification:
  - Voluntarily giving up party membership.
  - Voting against party whip.
- Exceptions originally:
  - Split (Paragraph 3)
  - Merger (Paragraph 4).
  - 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003 Removed split provision.
- Merger valid when:
  - At least 2/3rd members of legislature party support merger.
- Important Judgment:
  - Subhash Desai Case (2023):
    - Supreme Court upheld primacy of original political party.

## Bad fences

Marco Rubio's visit was an opportunity to mend economic and energy ties

Secretary of State Marco Rubio's four-day visit to India, his first since taking office in January 2025, was understood to have been aimed at smoothing bilateral ties that have been deeply ruptured over the past year. The problems have been multifold, ranging from the U.S.'s high tariffs and cutting down on visas, immigration and outsourcing; to sanctions on India's energy procurement and investment, its moves with China and Pakistan, and the pejorative remarks by President Donald Trump and his cabinet colleagues about India. Although the Modi government has not criticised the U.S. for its actions, there is no doubt that the U.S. attack on Iran on February 28, the wider regional conflict and the Hormuz Strait blockade, have caused immense economic worries for India as well. It was thus hoped that Mr. Rubio's visit, which combined the bilateral agenda alongside the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting, would help repair one of the worst phases in bilateral ties caused largely by Washington's unilateral moves. Mr. Rubio consistently held that the relationship was well and that "President Trump loves India", while responding to repeated questions on Mr. Trump's post that amplified anti-immigrant sentiments referring to India as a "hell-hole". New Delhi had no doubt laid out the red carpet for Mr. Rubio. In a departure from protocol, Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed him on his arrival and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar spent much of the weekend in meetings with Mr. Rubio, including two U.S. Embassy receptions. On Sunday, Mr. Jaishankar attended a celebration marking the U.S.'s 250th Independence Day and Mr. Rubio's birthday. Mr. Rubio visited the Missionaries of Charity, in Kolkata, and went to Agra and Jaipur for sightseeing. In bilateral talks, the Foreign Ministers discussed the full gamut of ties, including trade, energy, civil nuclear technological and defence cooperation, as well as the regional and geopolitical conflicts.

However, apart from one agreement on critical minerals cooperation, which replicates their partnership within the Quad and the 15-nation Pax Silica, the visit's bilateral part ended with few outcomes of note. Mr. Rubio's refusal to acknowledge a problem in the relationship indicates that the U.S., once considered India's most trusted partnership, has failed to recognise New Delhi's concerns. It is hoped, however, that Mr. Rubio was informed of them, as both sides prepare for a possible Modi-Trump meeting at the G-7 Summit in Evian, France, in mid-June, where India is a special invitee. This will be the first time that the leaders have come face to face since Mr. Modi's February 2025 Washington visit and all that followed, and an opportunity to mend the relationship especially in the areas it has frayed the most – economic, energy and regional security.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context of the News

- U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited India amid growing strains in India–U.S. relations.
- Key tensions emerged over:
  - U.S. tariffs and visa restrictions.
  - Sanctions affecting India's energy procurement.
  - Divergences regarding Iran, China and Pakistan.
  - Concerns after U.S. action against Iran and tensions in the Strait of Hormuz.
- Visit coincided with the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting.
- India and the U.S. discussed:
  - Trade and investment
  - Defence cooperation
  - Energy security
  - Critical minerals
  - Indo-Pacific security
- Major outcome:
  - Framework on critical minerals cooperation.

### Key Points

- India–U.S. ties are currently facing strategic and economic friction despite deepening cooperation.
- India is concerned over:

- Supply disruptions in West Asia.
- Energy security due to Hormuz Strait tensions.
- U.S. unilateral sanctions and protectionism.
- Critical minerals are strategically important for:
  - Semiconductors
  - Electric vehicles
  - Renewable energy
  - Defence manufacturing
- Quad aims to promote:
  - Free and open Indo-Pacific
  - Maritime security
  - Supply-chain resilience
- India continues to follow strategic autonomy in foreign policy.

### Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz is a major global oil chokepoint.
- India imports a large share of crude oil through West Asian sea routes.
- Strategic autonomy is a core principle of India's foreign policy.
- Critical minerals are essential for clean energy transition and advanced technologies.
- Quad includes India, U.S., Japan and Australia.
- India–U.S. Civil Nuclear Agreement (2008) strengthened strategic partnership.
- Supply-chain resilience gained importance after COVID-19 and U.S.–China tensions.

### Critical Analysis

#### Significance

- Strengthens Indo-Pacific cooperation.
- Enhances critical mineral supply-chain resilience.
- Supports technology and defence collaboration.
- Important for balancing China's influence.

#### Challenges

- U.S. tariffs affect Indian exports.
- Visa restrictions impact Indian professionals.
- Sanctions challenge India's strategic autonomy.
- West Asian instability threatens energy security.
- Divergences remain on Iran and Russia policies.

### Way Forward

- Diversify crude oil import sources.
- Build strategic petroleum reserves.
- Expand cooperation in critical minerals and semiconductors.
- Strengthen maritime security in Indian Ocean Region.
- Institutionalise trade and technology dialogue mechanisms.
- Maintain balanced multi-alignment strategy.

## Score board

The CBSE was ill-prepared for the examination reforms it undertook

India's education system is under severe stress. The NEET fiasco which caused immense suffering to nearly 22 lakh students exposed the deep structural flaws within the National Testing Agency, where one part conducts the JEE seamlessly while another appears clueless and completely out of its depth in conducting another high-stakes examination. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has caused much anxiety to and harmed a significant proportion of some 18 lakh students who took the Class 12 exams this year and whose answer scripts were evaluated through On Screen Marking (OSM) for the first time. It appears that little training was given to the staff scanning the answer sheets, and that no SOPs were in place after consultations with experts. Yet, some one crore sets of answer papers were scanned in record time. Evaluators were not really put through the paces; not prepped fully for the new interface; nor their screen fatigue evaluated for its impact on scoring. Ideally, OSM should first be tested on a smaller subset of answer sheets in parallel with the regular mode to evaluate whether there is any statistically significant deviation in scores between the two methods. This would have borne out whether the system was truly prepared for what was presented as a reform and allowed corrective measures before full-scale adoption.

It appears none of this was done. The result: a clear reduction in student performance, which was too significant to be dismissed as coincidence. When students received their scanned answer scripts, their fears appeared to have been validated. Widespread reports of mismatched scripts, unevaluated supplementary sheets, and unclear scans flooded social media, while many students complained that they had not received their scanned copies. To tamp down anger, the CBSE had slashed the fees for accessing answer scripts and re-evaluation while promising refunds where re-evaluation was found to be justified. More than 1.25 lakh students applied for accessing nearly four lakh answer scripts within a few hours of the window opening. Since then, the deadline for script access was extended repeatedly before ending on May 25. The CBSE has not yet revealed the plans for re-evaluation which is likely to be of a higher order this year. The Education Minister has said that the IITs have now been involved in troubleshooting. What is at stake is not just the CBSE's credibility but also the future of lakhs of students. The immediate task before the CBSE is to carry out the re-evaluation to the satisfaction of students. A long-term task would be to honestly address the root causes of the fiasco and implement solutions.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- CBSE introduced On-Screen Marking (OSM) for Class 12 board evaluation in 2026.
- Large-scale complaints emerged regarding:
  - Unevaluated supplementary sheets
  - Mismatched answer scripts
  - Poor-quality scans
  - Delay in grievance redressal
- Over 1.25 lakh students sought access to answer scripts.
- Issue followed concerns over the NEET examination system, highlighting weaknesses in India's examination governance.

### Key Points

- Around 18 lakh students appeared for CBSE Class 12 exams.
- OSM implemented without adequate pilot testing.
- Lack of:
  - SOPs
  - Evaluator training
  - Technical preparedness
- IITs involved later for troubleshooting.
- Raises concerns regarding:
  - Institutional accountability
  - Digital governance
  - Transparency in public examinations

### Static Linkages

- Education in Concurrent List.
- Article 21A: Right to Education.
- NEP 2020 promotes technology-enabled assessment reforms.
- Principles of good governance:
  - Transparency
  - Accountability
  - Procedural fairness
- E-governance requires:
  - Capacity building
  - Data integrity
  - Citizen-centric administration

### Critical Analysis

#### Positives

- Faster evaluation process
- Better digital record maintenance
- Reduced physical handling of answer sheets

#### Concerns

- Technological failures affected credibility.
- Lack of institutional preparedness.
- Mental stress among students.
- Weak grievance redressal.
- Risk of digital exclusion and administrative injustice.

### Way Forward

- Conduct independent audit of OSM process.
- Introduce phased implementation with pilot projects.
- Standardise SOPs and evaluator training.
- Strengthen grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Use AI-based verification for scanned scripts.
- Ensure transparency in re-evaluation process.
- Create autonomous examination regulatory standards.

# HDFC Bank 'camouflaged' crores as marketing spend to pay higher interest to state firm

In March, HDFC Bank chairman quit citing ethics. What bank didn't reveal: Its probe found that violating RBI, bank's norms, Rs 45-cr extra interest was paid to Maharashtra State Road Development Corp as sponsorship for road safety drive

Sandeep Singh

Mumbai, New Delhi, May 26

## ₹45-cr shadow deal: How 'camouflage' worked

WHEN ATANU Chakraborty abruptly resigned on March 18 as chairman of HDFC Bank, the country's largest private bank, citing "certain happenings and practices within the bank" that were not in "congruence" with his personal values and ethics, it didn't ring many alarm bells across the banking establishment.

The bank's newly appointed interim chairman, Keki Mistry, was quick to step in with a statement. "The bank has very strong ethics," he said on March 19. "I would never remain on the board if there were any issues with governance."

He said board members had pressed Chakraborty for details the previous day but he "did not give any specific explanation."

The Reserve Bank of India, too, moved just as swiftly. In a press statement the same day, it declared, "Basis our periodical assessment, there are no material concerns on record as regards its conduct or governance."

What went undisclosed was that, just six days earlier, on March 12, the Audit Committee

HDFC Bank MSRDC

STEP 1: In 2021, Bank taps MSRDC for deposit; MSRDC promises Rs 25,000 crore from its land acquisition fund

STEP 2: MSRDC says it's getting 6% interest from others, bank agrees to 6.01% even as it's 3.5% for others

STEP 3: Bank clears 2.51% extra interest for MSRDC. But it's paid by Marketing Dept through vendors as sponsorship for road safety drive

STEP 4: Starting Feb 2022, MSRDC starts placing deposits with Bank; Bank pays Rs 45 cr in batches between FY24 & FY25 through 4 vendors

Vendors raise invoice to the bank  
HDFC released the money over 2 years through vendors  
Vendors transfer money to MSRDC after deducting agency fee, GST & TDS



## Why this raises questions on bank's governance and its code of ethics

Sandeep Singh

New Delhi, May 26

EXPLAINING ITS code of ethics for directors and top management, HDFC Bank, on its website, underlines how "integrity, transparency and accountability are fundamental" to its ethos and how it intends to ensure its management's commitment to "highest business and ethical standards

while conducting the business of the Bank and compliance with the legal and regulatory requirements."

The fact that the bank's top brass were aware of the Rs 45-crore payment, which, according to its Vigilance probe, violates RBI rules and bank's own norms, raises questions about HDFC Bank's corporate governance and its

adherence to its code of ethics. From the CEO to the CFO and CMO, according to the probe, several key management personnel were fully aware of the "differential interest" being routed through the marketing department as payments for road safety campaigns by MSRDC, a state government agency that

adherence to its code of ethics. From the CEO to the CFO and CMO, according to the probe, several key management personnel were fully aware of the "differential interest" being routed through the marketing department as payments for road safety campaigns by MSRDC, a state government agency that

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- Internal vigilance probe in HDFC Bank allegedly found irregular payments of about ₹45 crore routed to Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC).
- Payments were allegedly made as "differential interest" over RBI-permitted rates and disguised as marketing expenditure for road safety campaigns.
- The issue emerged after former Chairman Atanu Chakraborty resigned citing ethical concerns.
- Probe reportedly implicated senior management officials including CEO, CFO, and CMO.
- Raises concerns regarding banking regulation, corporate governance, ethical conduct, and RBI oversight.

### Key Points

- RBI rules prohibit negotiated preferential savings deposit interest rates for select customers.
- Differential payments were allegedly routed through vendors instead of direct interest transfer.
- Internal audit flagged weak documentation and lack of compliance checks.
- Probe identified:
  - Regulatory violations
  - Governance failures
  - Weak internal controls
  - Reputational risks
- Case highlights risks of regulatory arbitrage in the banking sector.

## Static Linkages

- Banking Regulation Act, 1949 empowers RBI to regulate banks.
- Corporate governance principles:
  - Transparency
  - Accountability
  - Fiduciary responsibility
  - Ethical conduct
- Audit Committees ensure compliance and internal oversight.
- Prudential regulation protects depositor confidence and financial stability.
- Ethical lapses in financial institutions can create systemic risks.

## Critical Analysis

### Concerns

- Possible violation of RBI deposit norms.
- Indicates weak compliance and audit systems.
- Preferential treatment undermines fairness in banking.
- May reduce public trust in financial institutions.

### Ethical Issues

- Lack of transparency in routing payments.
- Conflict with integrity and fiduciary duties.
- Possible misuse of marketing expenditure channels.

### Regulatory Challenges

- Difficulty in detecting disguised financial arrangements.
- Need for stronger supervisory mechanisms in large private banks.

## Way Forward

- Strengthen RBI forensic audit and supervision.
- Ensure stricter disclosure norms for bulk deposit arrangements.
- Improve accountability of board-level audit committees.
- Strengthen whistleblower protection mechanisms.
- Enhance compliance monitoring through digital audit systems.
- Enforce stricter penalties for governance violations.
- Promote ethics-based banking culture.

# Warmer nights are a public-health challenge

**S**UMMERS IN most parts of India have usually been harsh. However, sunset would bring some relief. The evening breeze and lower temperatures allowed the human body to recover from daytime stress. But this pattern is changing. Nights have become uncomfortable, especially for those without access to air conditioning. A recent study by Climate Trends, a Delhi-based climate research organisation, in medium- and low-income residential units in Chennai, showed that the peak night temperature was not very different from that experienced by people during the hottest part of the day. Research on the ways this changing weather pattern is affecting people's lives is an emerging field. Heat-related morbidity is also under-reported and not properly documented. But studies have underlined how heat can cause cardiac stress and worsen existing illnesses, including respiratory problems and kidney ailments. The elderly, children and people dependent on outdoor jobs — vendors, construction workers, and those employed in the gig economy — are particularly vulnerable.

Several Indian states, cities and even districts have heat action plans (HAPs). They generally include early-warming systems, public advisories, cooling centres and coordination between local agencies. However, the quality of these plans is uneven. Several lack dedicated funding and enforcement mechanisms. The emphasis is overwhelmingly on emergency response, and inadequate attention is given to long-term adaptation. Most of them fail to identify the most vulnerable sections and do not suggest roadmaps to incorporate heat resilience in urban governance. A White Paper by researchers at Harvard University's Salata Institute, released in April, underlines the scale of the challenge — it pointed out that close to 38 crore workers in India are exposed to heat, but the country's adaptation policies are deeply unequal.

In most of urban India, natural landscapes have been replaced with heat-absorbing concrete, asphalt and glass. The arrangement of housing enclaves has shrunk air corridors. The changing weather pattern, therefore, is also an architectural and urban planning challenge. Building designs need to prioritise ventilation and energy efficiency, while public policy should nudge industry to devise cooling solutions for low-income households. The country cannot postpone meaningful conversations on improving living conditions in the face of climate vagaries.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- Rising night-time temperatures across Indian cities are emerging as a major climate and public health concern.
- Study by Climate Trends in Chennai showed that peak night temperatures in low-income settlements remain close to daytime heat levels.
- Heat stress is increasingly affecting:
  - Outdoor workers
  - Urban poor
  - Elderly and children
- Existing Heat Action Plans (HAPs) focus mainly on emergency response rather than long-term adaptation.
- Harvard Salata Institute report highlighted that nearly 38 crore workers in India face heat exposure risks.

### Key Points

- Urban Heat Island Effect intensifies night temperatures due to:
  - Concrete infrastructure
  - Asphalt surfaces
  - Loss of green cover
  - Reduced air circulation
- Heat stress leads to:
  - Cardiac problems
  - Respiratory illnesses
  - Kidney ailments
  - Productivity losses
- Major weaknesses in Heat Action Plans:

- Lack of dedicated funding
- Weak implementation
- Poor identification of vulnerable groups
- Absence of long-term urban planning
- Informal workers and gig workers are highly vulnerable due to prolonged outdoor exposure.
- Rising cooling demand may increase:
  - Electricity consumption
  - Carbon emissions
  - Urban inequality

### Static Linkages

- NDMA Guidelines on Heat Waves (2019):
  - Early warning systems
  - Public awareness
  - Inter-agency coordination
  - India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP), 2019 Reduce cooling demand
  - Promote sustainable cooling
  - National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) Sustainable Habitat Mission
  - Article 21 Right to life includes right to health and clean environment
  - 74th Constitutional Amendment Urban local bodies responsible for public health and urban planning
- Concepts:
  - Urban Heat Island Effect
  - Wet Bulb Temperature
  - Climate Adaptation

### Critical Analysis

#### Significance

- Highlights climate change as a public health and governance challenge.
- Shows linkage between urban planning and climate resilience.
- Reveals socio-economic inequality in climate vulnerability.

#### Challenges

- Heat Action Plans remain reactive.
- Poor urban design increases heat retention.
- Limited access to affordable cooling for poor households.
- Heat-related illnesses remain underreported.
- Lack of coordination between health, urban and labour departments.

#### Governance Concerns

- Weak urban local body capacity.
- Inadequate climate-sensitive infrastructure planning.
- Absence of heat-resilient housing standards.

## Way Forward

- Integrate heat resilience into urban master plans.
- Expand green cover and restore urban ventilation corridors.
- Promote:
  - Cool roofs
  - Reflective construction materials
  - Passive cooling architecture
- Strengthen Heat Action Plans with:
  - Dedicated funding
  - Local-level vulnerability mapping
  - Community participation
- Introduce labour protection measures during extreme heat.
- Improve heat-health surveillance and data collection.
- Ensure affordable sustainable cooling access for vulnerable groups.