



# DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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**CIVILS WITH AKASH  
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

# Foreigners who left India after voting in T.N. Assembly election come under scanner

Central, State law enforcement agencies have been working with EC to obtain data on foreign nationals who might have voted; investigators have also sought the Bureau of Immigration's help

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After detecting around 40 cases of foreign nationals of Indian origin allegedly voting in the recent Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, investigators have shifted their focus to those who returned abroad shortly after the April 23 polling.

According to official sources, Central and State law-enforcement agencies are working with the Election Commission of India (EC) to obtain data on suspected foreign nationals who might have voted in the election. Investigators have sought the assistance of the Bureau of Immigration, Government of India, in identifying foreign nationals who arrived in the State ahead of the election and departed within two to three days of polling.

The authorities are also verifying social media posts and videos in which individuals claimed to have travelled to Chennai, Bengaluru, and other cities, specifically to exercise



**Final call:** Any decision on the validity of the votes cast by foreign nationals in the Assembly elections will have to be taken by the EC, said a senior State government official. FILE PHOTO

franchise. "It is possible to verify whether these individuals voted in the Assembly election. If they did, it would amount to cheating and violation of provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. We are also examining how their names were not removed from the electoral rolls during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR). If a voter is falsely shown to be residing in India, action will be taken against those responsible for making the false declaration," a senior State go-

vernment official told *The Hindu* on Monday.

The first case of alleged illegal voting came to light in the second week of May when a couple were questioned by immigration officials at the Madurai airport while preparing to board a flight to Colombo. Questioned about the indelible ink marks on their fingers, they admitted to having voted in the election using their Electors Photo Identity Cards (EPICs). They were subsequently handed over to the Avaniapuram police.

In another case, a United Kingdom national of Indian origin was detained at the Chennai airport after admitting that he had voted in the Velachery constituency. He was handed over to the local police for further investigation.

## 'False declaration'

"During the SIR, family members appear to have filled the enumeration form and signed it on behalf of the foreign national. This would amount to a false declaration. Proceedings will be initiated through appropriate channels against the individuals who voted and then left the country," the official said.

Apart from prosecution for fraudulent voting, foreign nationals found to have voted in the election could face cancellation of their Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cards, the official said. He added that any decision on the validity of the votes cast by foreign nationals in the Assembly election would have to be taken by the EC.

- Article 326 – Universal Adult Suffrage.
- Citizenship Act, 1955.
- Representation of the People Act, 1950.
- Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- Universal Adult Franchise.
- Basic Structure Doctrine – Free and Fair Elections.
- Electoral Roll Revision Process.
- Concept of "Ordinarily Resident" for voter registration.
- Difference between Citizenship and OCI status.

## Critical Analysis

### Significance

- Protects the sanctity of the electoral process.
- Reinforces the principle of "One Citizen, One Vote."
- Enhances credibility of democratic institutions.
- Strengthens public trust in election outcomes.

### Challenges

- Difficulty in identifying voters who acquire foreign citizenship.
- Errors during electoral roll revision.
- Dependence on self-declaration during voter registration.
- Limited integration between immigration and electoral databases.

### Constitutional Concerns

- Electoral fraud undermines democratic legitimacy.
- Ineligible voting violates principles of representative democracy.
- Weak electoral rolls may affect the fairness of elections.

### Administrative Concerns

- Need for better verification mechanisms.
- Accountability of officials involved in voter registration.
- Coordination challenges among multiple agencies.

## Way Forward

- Strengthen verification during electoral roll revisions.
- Integrate voter databases with immigration and citizenship records.
- Conduct periodic audits of overseas-linked voter registrations.
- Increase awareness regarding voting eligibility and OCI status.
- Use technology-driven verification systems.
- Ensure strict penalties for false declarations and fraudulent voting.
- Improve coordination between ECI, Bureau of Immigration, and State authorities.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- Around 40 cases of foreign nationals of Indian origin allegedly voting in the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections have come under investigation.
- The Election Commission of India (ECI), Bureau of Immigration, and law-enforcement agencies are verifying voter records, immigration data, and social media evidence.
- The issue has highlighted concerns regarding electoral roll accuracy, voter eligibility, and electoral integrity.
- Authorities are examining whether false declarations were made during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

### Key Points

- Only Indian citizens are eligible to vote in Parliamentary and State Assembly elections.
- Foreign citizens, including Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders, are not entitled to voting rights.
- Electoral rolls are prepared and revised under the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1950.
- False declaration for voter registration constitutes an electoral offence.
- ECI is empowered under Article 324 to supervise and conduct elections.
- Cases under investigation involve individuals allegedly retaining their names in electoral rolls after acquiring foreign citizenship.

### Static Linkages

- Article 324 – Election Commission of India.

# 24 Indian sailors rescued from ship attacked by U.S.

Marivex, sanctioned by the U.S. last December, had earlier carried Iranian oil to India; U.S. Central Command says the tanker violated the ongoing blockade by attempting to sail to an Iranian port

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**T**wenty-four Indian seafarers were rescued from tanker Marivex, a ship sanctioned by the U.S. for Iran links, off the south-eastern coast of Oman on Monday, after a U.S. missile strike.

The sailors sent distress messages to a Forward Seamen's Union of India (FSUI) office-bearer that the U.S. Navy had attacked the ship's engine room.

Audio messages from the seafarers to Manoj Yadav, general secretary of FSUI, received at 2 p.m. (India time) say: "This is Motor Tanker Marivex. Fire on board. Vessel is sinking. U.S. Navy attacked with missile our engine room. We have a hole at the bottom."

U.S. Central Command (Centcom) said in a statement that "U.S. forces disabled (attacked) an unladen oil tanker in the Gulf of Oman, June 8, after the vessel violated the ongoing blockade against Iran by attempting to sail to an Iranian port. An F/A-18 Super



Smoke rises from Marivex, off the coast of Oman, on Monday, after a suspected U.S. missile attack. FSUI

Hornet from USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) fired a precision munition into the ship's engineering and steering spaces after the crew failed to comply with directions from U.S. forces. Marivex is no longer sailing to Iran."

The Marivex crew's distress message says that there was a U.S. warship nearby that was not helping, neither was there an immediate response from the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre. Video clips sent to Mr. Yadav show a seafarer from the

state of shock and most of them have lost their phones. They are expected to reach India in two days," he said.

## 'Tanker was empty'

A statement from the Centre said a "fire incident was reported today aboard the vessel MT MARIVEX at approximately 13:30 hours off the coast of Oman."

Earlier, at a news briefing, Opesh Kumar Sharma, director at the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, declined to comment on the cause of the fire. "The vessel has 24 Indian seafarers, all are reported to be safe," he said. He added the tanker was empty and located away from the Strait of Hormuz.

Marivex is a ship sanctioned by the U.S. government last December, as per shipping database Equasis.

Marivex was one of the few ships that exited the Strait of Hormuz on April 9 just when the ceasefire was declared. It had then carried crude oil from Bandar Abbas in Iran to Mangalore. Marivex has been operating in the "conflict zone", said Mr. Yadav.

ship pointing to a warship nearby. The audio messages say the lifeboats on one side of the ship were also hit in the attack and the other side lifeboats were not accessible due to a fire that had broken out.

Eventually, a rescue operation evacuated the 24 Indian seafarers, who had moved to the front-end of the vessel when on fire, through helicopter.

The seafarers are now on the Masirah Island in Oman, and safe, said Mr. Yadav. "All of them are in a

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context of the News

- Twenty-four Indian seafarers were rescued from the tanker MT Marivex off the coast of Oman after a U.S. military strike damaged the vessel.
- The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) stated that the tanker was targeted for allegedly violating sanctions-related restrictions concerning Iran.
- The vessel had previously been sanctioned by the United States for its involvement in Iranian oil transportation.
- All Indian crew members were safely evacuated and shifted to Masirah Island, Oman.
- The incident occurred amid continuing geopolitical tensions in the West Asian region, highlighting concerns regarding maritime security and energy supply routes.

### Key Points

- MT Marivex was under U.S. sanctions due to links with Iranian oil trade.
- The incident occurred in the Gulf of Oman, a strategically important maritime region.
- The tanker had earlier transported crude oil from Bandar Abbas (Iran).
- The event underscores the impact of geopolitical conflicts on international shipping.
- Safety of Indian seafarers remains a critical concern as India is one of the largest suppliers of maritime manpower globally.
- The incident has implications for India's energy security and maritime interests.

### Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman.

- Around 20% of global oil trade passes through the Strait of Hormuz.
- Bandar Abbas is Iran's major port located near the Strait of Hormuz.
- UNCLOS, 1982 provides the legal framework governing maritime navigation and rights of passage.
- International Maritime Organization (IMO) regulates international shipping standards and maritime safety.
- Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) are critical for global trade and energy transportation.
- The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is central to India's trade, energy imports, and strategic interests.

## Critical Analysis

### Significance

- Highlights growing instability in West Asia.
- Demonstrates how geopolitical conflicts directly affect Indian citizens abroad.
- Reinforces the strategic importance of maritime security.

### Concerns

- Threat to uninterrupted energy supplies.
- Increased risks for Indian seafarers working in conflict zones.
- Potential rise in shipping and insurance costs.
- Challenges to freedom of navigation in critical sea routes.

### India's Stakes

- Dependence on West Asian energy imports.
- Large number of Indian workers and seafarers in the Gulf region.
- Need for secure maritime trade routes for economic growth.

## Way Forward

- Strengthen maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Enhance protection and welfare mechanisms for Indian seafarers.
- Diversify sources and routes of energy imports.
- Deepen cooperation with Gulf countries on maritime security.
- Support a rules-based maritime order under UNCLOS.
- Improve emergency evacuation and crisis-response capabilities.

# Nicobar project will enhance maritime security: officials

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NEW DELHI

Under the Great Nicobar Island Development Project, India plans to invest around ₹13,000 crore to build a dual-use airport and runway for both civilian and Navy operations, said a senior official with the Ministry of Defence on Monday.

According to sources in the Ministry, the project, expected to be completed within five years, will be jointly funded by the Ministry along with the Ministry of Civil Aviation. The government views the initiative as a strategic investment aimed at strengthening maritime security, boosting regional connect-

tivity and enhancing India's presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

**Four components**  
Elaborating about the project, the official said the project comprises four major components – an International Container Trans-shipment Port (ICTP), a joint-user greenfield airport and Naval Air Station, a modern township, and a power plant. Together, these projects are expected to transform Great Nicobar into a key maritime and economic hub while enhancing India's defence capabilities in the strategically significant Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Located just 40 km from the Six Degree Channel,



The project comprises a port, airport, and power plant. AFP

would reduce India's dependence on foreign trans-shipment ports and strengthen its ability to monitor and secure vital Sea Lanes of Communication.

The proposed greenfield airport, approved by the Union Cabinet and to be operated by the Indian Navy, is expected to significantly improve maritime domain awareness, logistics support, and rapid deployment capabilities. The airport is also expected to promote tourism, officials said. It is understood that five sites, including INS Baaz at Campbell Bay, were assessed before Galathea Bay was selected for the airport. Technical constraints, limited expansion possibilities, and environ-

mental concerns reportedly made the expansion of INS Baaz unviable.

**Extensive studies**  
Addressing concerns over environmental impact and tribal rights, officials said the project has undergone extensive environmental assessments involving institutions such as the Zoological Survey of India, Wildlife Institute of India and the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History. Of the island's total area, only 166.1 square kilometres have been earmarked for development, while more than 88% will continue to remain under forests, biosphere reserves, national parks and tribal conservation zones.

A dedicated conservation package worth ₹2,220 crore over 30 years has been planned to protect wildlife, including leatherback turtles, Nicobar megapodes and crocodiles, as well as coral reefs and mangrove ecosystems. The official confirmed that no physical displacement of tribal communities is proposed and that consultations were conducted with tribal welfare authorities and representative bodies.

Besides strategic gains, the project is expected to generate over one lakh direct and indirect employment opportunities, providing a significant economic boost to the island region.

- Conservation package of ₹2,220 crore over 30 years.
- Focus on protection of:
  - Leatherback Turtle
  - Nicobar Megapode
  - Saltwater Crocodile
  - Coral reefs
  - Mangroves

## Tribal Aspects

- No physical displacement of tribal communities proposed.
- Consultations conducted with tribal welfare authorities.
- Protection of interests of:
  - Shompen (PVTG)
  - Nicobarese Tribe

## Static Linkages

### Location-Based Facts

- Great Nicobar is the southernmost island of India.
- Indira Point is India's southernmost point.
- Located close to:
  - Malacca Strait
  - Six Degree Channel

### Ecological Importance

- Part of the Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve.
- Includes:
  - Campbell Bay National Park
  - Galathea National Park
- UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

### Strategic Importance

- Andaman & Nicobar Command (ANC):
  - Established in 2001.
  - India's first and only Tri-Service Command.
- Critical for monitoring maritime traffic in the eastern Indian Ocean.

### Tribal Communities

- Shompen – Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)
- Nicobarese – Scheduled Tribe (ST)

## Critical Analysis

### Opportunities

- Strengthens India's strategic position in the Indo-Pacific.
- Enhances maritime security and surveillance.
- Reduces logistics dependence on foreign ports.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- The Government of India is implementing the Great Nicobar Island Development Project with an estimated investment of ₹13,000 crore.
- A dual-use greenfield airport and Naval Air Station will be developed for civilian and military operations.
- The project aims to enhance maritime security, regional connectivity, economic development, and India's strategic presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

### Key Highlights

#### Project Components

- International Container Trans-shipment Port (ICTP)
- Greenfield International Airport and Naval Air Station
- Modern Township
- Power Plant

#### Strategic Significance

- Great Nicobar is located near the Six Degree Channel, a major international shipping route.
- Enhances:
  - Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)
  - Surveillance of Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs)
  - Rapid deployment of defence assets
- Supports India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision.
- Strengthens India's role in the Indo-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

#### Economic Significance

- Reduces dependence on foreign trans-shipment ports.
- Promotes:
  - Blue Economy
  - Trade and logistics
  - Tourism
- Expected to generate more than 1 lakh direct and indirect jobs.

#### Environmental Measures

- Only 166.1 sq km earmarked for development.
- More than 81% of the island area remains protected.

- Promotes regional economic development.
- Generates employment opportunities.
- Boosts Blue Economy potential.

#### Challenges

- Ecologically sensitive island ecosystem.
- Potential impact on endemic flora and fauna.
- Seismic and tsunami vulnerability.
- Long-term sustainability concerns.
- Need for continuous tribal rights protection.

#### Way Forward

- Ensure strict compliance with environmental safeguards.
- Adopt a sustainable development model.
- Strengthen biodiversity monitoring mechanisms.
- Enhance participation of tribal communities.
- Develop climate-resilient infrastructure.
- Establish independent environmental audits.
- Integrate the project with SAGAR and Blue Economy initiatives.

# A troubling judgment and endorsement of the SIR

The judgment of the Supreme Court of India, delivered on May 27, 2026, on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, has thrown up many disturbing questions about the powers, the role and the conduct of the Election Commission of India (ECI) in the context of the exercise of its powers in the preparation and revision of electoral rolls.

Although this case is related to the operationalisation of the SIR in Bihar, the issues dealt with by the Court and its findings have far-reaching implications for the rights of Indian citizens to be included in electoral rolls. In its 124-page judgment, the Court dealt with all the important points raised by the petitioners against the SIR but refused to concede even a single one of them. On the other hand, the Court accepted all the arguments made by the ECI and further elucidated them.

## Revisiting electoral roll revision

When the SIR was begun in Bihar just a few months before the Assembly election in Bihar, in 2025, serious reservations were expressed about the advisability of undertaking such a comprehensive and intensive revision of the electoral rolls in such a short time. There have been a number of articles in this daily highlighting the ECI's deviations from statutory provisions in the implementation of the SIR. So, in light of the Court's judgment upholding the ECI's actions and methods, it is useful to revisit the statutory and constitutional provisions governing electoral roll preparation and revision and assess the judgment accordingly.

Article 325 of the Constitution declares that there shall be one general electoral roll for every territorial constituency in the country and that no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in such a roll solely on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or any of them. Article 326 empowers Parliament to make laws for dealing with all aspects of elections including the preparation of electoral rolls. Article 324 confers the power to prepare the rolls and conduct the elections on the ECI. Preparation of electoral rolls which



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includes revision is governed by the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1950 and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. Section 21 of the RP Act deals with preparation and revision of the electoral rolls. Sections 2(a) and (b) which contained the framework of revision say in (a)(ii), electoral roll shall be revised before each general election to the Lok Sabha or the Assembly and before each by-election, (b) the roll shall be revised in any year if directed by the ECI; and Section 21(3) says that the ECI may do a special revision of the roll for any constituency or part of a constituency at any time after recording the reasons for such revision. Rule 25 of the Registration of Electors Rules says that the revision of the rolls under Section 21 (2) of the Act before the general election or by-election can be summary or intensive, which clearly implies that such revision just before the general election can be only summary considering the elaborate scheme of an intensive revision under the rules.

## The framework

The question, then, is: under which category of revision does the SIR fall? The Court says that it is traceable to Section 21(3) which deals with a special revision in any constituency or a part of a constituency. But the clause does not permit an intensive revision but only a special revision. SIR is a special and intensive revision of the rolls. Intensive revision according to Rule 25 is done only under Section 21(2) and not 21(3) of the Act as the judgment claims. A careful reading of Sections 21(2) and (3) of the RP Act 1950 and Rule 25 of the Registration of Electors Rules 1960 would reveal that an intensive revision of the roll in a State can be undertaken only when the general election or by-election is not due. It is obvious that an intensive revision is not contemplated by the law when the elections are due because of the comprehensive nature of the revision which requires a much longer time to complete.

Now, as regards the special revision under Section 21(3), it is actually meant to be done in a constituency or a part of a constituency and not the whole State or the country. The claim made in the judgment that "any constituency" means all constituencies does not square with the context. The word "any" may mean "all" in some contexts whereas it would mean "single" in some other context. The words "or a part of constituency" following "any constituency" make it clear that the special revision is meant to be done only in a constituency or part of it. When intensive revision is clearly provided in Section 21(2) there is no need to provide the same in Section 21(3). Special revision may become

necessary in some constituencies because of, say, the large-scale influx of people into that area from a neighbouring area. Special revision is done in a manner fixed by the ECI whereas intensive revision under Section 21(2) needs to be done as per the prescribed procedure.

The analysis above would show that the entire SIR exercise is being done under a wrong provision of law. In the States of Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal, the SIR was done a few months before the Assembly election. Under Section 21(2)(a) read with Rules 25 only a summary revision was possible before the Assembly election. But the ECI went ahead with the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in clear deviation from the scheme of the law, resulting in the deletion of millions of voters from the electoral rolls without providing them any effective redress.

## The issue of citizenship

The judgment grants great freedom to the ECI in the matter of determining the documents to prove citizenship. The crucial point is whether the ECI can determine what documents are required to prove citizenship. This is a function to be performed by the Home Ministry as it administers the law on citizenship. The ECI's role is to verify citizen related documents. What actually happened was that the ECI announced a list of documents and asked the voters to produce them. The ECI was simply usurping the role of the Union Home Ministry. It is extremely surprising that during the hearing the Supreme Court did not ask the Union Home Ministry to file an affidavit containing the list of documents required to prove citizenship. The Court has now conceded the ECI's authority to determine the question of citizenship for the purpose of inclusion in or exclusion from the electoral rolls, while leaving the larger question of citizenship to the competent authority, namely the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Ministry of Home Affairs will now have to decide the cases of millions of Indian citizens who will never be able to vote in their lifetime and who will face numerous disabilities arising from the denial of citizenship, albeit on a tentative basis.

The Court has hitherto applauded the work done all these years by the ECI since its establishment. But the SIR judgment speaks about the "cumulative inaccuracies in the voters list" and the "structural deficiencies that pervaded the entire roll" in the past. It is a damning indictment of the preparation and the revision of electoral rolls done by the ECI in the past. The judgment need not have gone to such an extent in order to justify the SIR of 2025.

- Section 21(3) Special revision of electoral rolls after recording reasons.
- Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 Prescribes procedures for summary and intensive revisions.

## Significance of the Judgment

- Reinforces ECI's autonomy in electoral roll management.
- Recognizes the need to remove:
  - Duplicate entries.
  - Bogus voters.
  - Ineligible names.
- Raises important questions regarding voter inclusion and procedural safeguards.

## Static Linkages

- Free and Fair Elections are part of the Basic Structure Doctrine.
- Right to vote is a constitutional/statutory right, not a Fundamental Right.
- Electoral rolls are prepared under the RP Act, 1950.
- ECI is a constitutional body.
- Citizenship matters are governed by the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- Judicial review remains available against arbitrary electoral actions.

## Critical Analysis

### Arguments in Favour

- Improves accuracy of electoral rolls.
- Strengthens electoral integrity.
- Reduces chances of voter impersonation and fraud.
- Enhances public confidence in elections.

### Concerns

- Possibility of exclusion of genuine voters.
- Intensive revision near elections may create administrative difficulties.
- Ambiguity regarding ECI's role in citizenship-related verification.
- Greater discretion without adequate safeguards may affect inclusiveness.

## Way Forward

- Establish clear statutory guidelines for special and intensive revisions.
- Ensure revisions are completed well before elections.
- Strengthen grievance-redress mechanisms.
- Adopt transparent and uniform verification procedures.
- Balance electoral integrity with universal adult suffrage.
- Increase voter awareness and accessibility.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- On 27 May 2026, the Supreme Court upheld the legality of the Election Commission of India's (ECI) Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.
- The case arose from challenges to the SIR exercise conducted in Bihar ahead of Assembly elections.
- Petitioners argued that:
  - SIR lacked proper statutory backing.
  - Intensive revision close to elections could lead to voter exclusion.
  - ECI exceeded its authority by prescribing citizenship-related documents.
- The Court upheld the ECI's actions and interpreted its powers broadly under the constitutional and statutory framework.

### Key Points

#### Constitutional Provisions

- Article 324 – Superintendence, direction and control of elections vested in ECI.
- Article 325 – One general electoral roll for every constituency; no discrimination based on religion, race, caste or sex.
- Article 326 – Elections based on Universal Adult Suffrage (18 years and above).
- Article 327 – Parliament empowered to legislate on electoral matters.

#### Legal Framework

- Representation of the People Act, 1950 Governs preparation and revision of electoral rolls.
- Section 21(2) Revision before general elections and by-elections.

The top court's verdict raises constitutional concerns and casts a shadow over past electoral rolls

# The Oman CEPA, a new gateway for India's exports

India and Oman share one of the oldest trading relationships, with commercial and maritime links dating back thousands of years. From the movement of spices, textiles and frankincense to enduring people-to-people ties, trade has long been a cornerstone of this partnership. The India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which came into force on June 1, 2026, reaffirms and strengthens this historic relationship by providing a modern framework to deepen trade, investment and economic cooperation for the future.



**Anant Goenka**  
President,  
The Federation of  
Indian Chambers  
of Commerce and  
Industry (FICCI)

India is amongst the top suppliers for Oman and bilateral trade has grown from \$8.94 billion in FY2023-24 to \$11.18 billion in FY2025-26, reflecting the growing complementarities between the two economies.

**An expansion of India's trade ties**  
The CEPA comes at a time when India is actively diversifying its trade partnerships and integrating more deeply with global value chains. Following agreements with the United Arab Emirates, Australia, the European Free Trade Association, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the European Union, the Oman CEPA further strengthens India's presence in a region that is central to its energy security, trade and strategic interests.

The CEPA offers significant opportunities for Indian exporters. Oman has offered duty-free access on 98.08% of its tariff lines, covering 99.38% of India's exports by value. Before the agreement, only 15.33% of India's exports entered Oman at zero duty under the Most Favoured Nation regime. The CEPA, therefore, provides an immediate competitiveness boost across a broad range of sectors. In textiles and apparel, India already commands a 43% share of Oman's woven apparel imports and 31% of knitted apparel imports. The removal of the existing 5% tariff will strengthen the competitiveness of Indian manufacturers against China, which is the other dominant supplier in this market. In the case of chemicals, India already supplies nearly 39% of Oman's inorganic chemical imports, making it

The agreement  
boosts exports,  
services,  
investment and  
professional  
mobility

one of the leading players in the market. Tariff free access will only amplify this further.

Likewise, engineering goods will also benefit. Oman imports over \$3.7 billion worth of mechanical machinery and \$3.3 billion worth of automobiles annually, where India's market share is only 5% and 2%, respectively. Preferential market access under the CEPA can help Indian exports of engineering goods expand significantly and deepen their presence in Oman's infrastructure, construction and industrial sectors.

In pharmaceuticals, where India holds around 10% market share, the agreement's value lies not in tariff reductions but in regulatory facilitation.

Products approved by leading international regulators will benefit from fast-tracked approvals, reducing compliance costs and accelerating market entry. As Oman's pharmaceutical market continues to expand, Indian companies will be well-positioned to capture a larger share. Duty-free access for products such as meat, eggs, honey, butter and processed foods will further strengthen India's already strong position. At the same time, sensitive sectors such as dairy, cereals, edible oils and several agricultural commodities have been kept outside tariff concessions, ensuring that domestic producers remain protected.

#### Streamlining procedures

Significant trade facilitation measures have been introduced. Oman will accept certificates issued by India's Export Inspection Council (EIC), eliminating duplicative testing and inspections, while also recognising India's organic (NPOP) and halal certification systems. There are dedicated sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and technical barriers to trade (TBT) provisions, which will enhance regulatory transparency and cooperation, and streamlined customs clearance, which will reduce costs and improve export efficiency.

Another forward-looking aspect of the CEPA is its strong focus on services and professional mobility. Bilateral services trade stood at \$863

million in 2024, with India enjoying a surplus of nearly \$447 million. Yet, India's share in Oman's global services imports remains just over 5%, indicating substantial untapped potential.

Oman has undertaken binding commitments covering professionals in sectors such as accounting, engineering, information technology, health care, education and consulting. Oman also raises the quotas for intra-corporate transferees, facilitating greater mobility of Indian professionals and specialists. Provisions relating to AYUSH and traditional medicine further create opportunities for Indian health care and wellness services in the Gulf.

#### Strategic location advantage

Beyond trade statistics, the CEPA has a larger strategic significance. Oman occupies a unique position at the crossroads of the Gulf, the Indian Ocean and East Africa. Its ports at Sohar, Duqm and Salalah are emerging as major logistics and industrial hubs. For Indian businesses, Oman can serve not only as a destination market but also as a gateway to the wider Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region and East African economies.

The India-Oman CEPA once again demonstrates the evolution of India's trade policy from tariff negotiations to comprehensive economic partnerships encompassing goods, services, investment, mobility and regulatory cooperation. Its benefits will extend from textile clusters in Tamil Nadu and the gems and jewellery industry in Gujarat to engineering hubs in Maharashtra and Punjab, and from pharmaceutical manufacturers in Telangana to seafood exporters in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.

The real test will now lie in implementation and utilisation. If businesses actively leverage the opportunities created by the agreement, the CEPA can significantly expand India's export footprint, strengthen economic integration with the Gulf, and support the country's broader ambition of becoming a globally competitive manufacturing and services powerhouse. For India, the agreement opens not only the Omani market but also a broader gateway to the Gulf and beyond.

- Healthcare
- Education
- Consulting
- Accounting

- Increased quotas for intra-corporate transferees.
- Promotion of AYUSH and traditional healthcare services.

## Trade Facilitation Measures

- Recognition of:
  - Export Inspection Council (EIC) certificates
  - National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP)
  - Indian Halal Certification
- Faster customs clearance procedures.
- Dedicated provisions on:
  - Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures
  - Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)

## Significance for India

### Economic Significance

- Expands export opportunities for Indian industries.
- Enhances India's participation in Global Value Chains (GVCs).
- Supports the Make in India initiative.
- Improves competitiveness of Indian products in West Asian markets.
- Encourages investment and industrial cooperation.

### Strategic Significance

- Strengthens India's presence in the Gulf region.
- Supports India's Act West Policy.
- Reinforces the SAGAR vision (Security and Growth for All in the Region).
- Enhances maritime and economic connectivity across the Indian Ocean.

### Gateway Advantage

Oman serves as a gateway to:

- Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) markets
- West Asia
- East Africa
- Global maritime trade routes

Strategically important ports include:

- Port of Duqm
- Port of Sohar
- Port of Salalah

## Static Linkages

### WTO Provisions

- Most Favoured Nation (MFN) Principle
- Regional Trade Agreements under GATT Article XXIV
- Trade Facilitation Measures

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- The India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) came into force on 1 June 2026.
- It seeks to deepen bilateral cooperation in:
  - Trade in Goods
  - Trade in Services
  - Investment
  - Professional Mobility
  - Regulatory Cooperation
- Bilateral trade increased from US\$ 8.94 billion (FY 2023-24) to US\$ 11.18 billion (FY 2025-26).
- The agreement is part of India's broader strategy to strengthen economic engagement with the Gulf region and diversify export markets.

## Key Highlights of the CEPA

### Market Access

- Oman has provided:
  - Duty-free access on 98.08% tariff lines
  - Covering 99.38% of India's exports by value
- Prior to CEPA:
  - Only 15.33% of Indian exports enjoyed zero-duty access under the MFN regime.

### Major Beneficiary Sectors

- Textiles and Apparel
- Chemicals and Petrochemicals
- Engineering Goods
- Automobiles and Auto Components
- Pharmaceuticals
- Gems and Jewellery
- Processed Food Products
- Seafood Exports

### Services and Mobility

- Enhanced market access for Indian professionals in:
  - Information Technology
  - Engineering

### Important Concepts

- Free Trade Agreement (FTA)
- Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)
- Rules of Origin
- Trade Creation and Trade Diversion
- Global Value Chains (GVCs)

### Related Initiatives

- Make in India
- PM Gati Shakti
- SAGAR
- Act West Policy
- Maritime Vision 2030

### Challenges

- Low utilization of FTAs by Indian MSMEs.
- Compliance with Rules of Origin requirements.
- Competition from other exporting countries.
- Need for improved logistics and export infrastructure.
- Awareness gaps among exporters regarding CEPA benefits.

### Way Forward

- Increase awareness among MSMEs regarding CEPA provisions.
- Strengthen export infrastructure and logistics.
- Improve ease of doing business for exporters.
- Enhance standards, certification and quality compliance.
- Promote sector-specific export strategies.
- Leverage Oman as a regional logistics and investment hub.

## Strategic afterthought

The government must be transparent with the Nicobar project

For a project so often invoked as a matter of national security strategy, the ballooning Great Nicobar Island development, now estimated to be at ₹91,000 crore, rests on a remarkably thin strategic record. The Centre has long cited the "strategic" character of its centre-piece – a transshipment port at Galathea Bay – to withhold information on its environmental clearances. Yet, the Public Investment Board (PIB), a Finance Ministry body, found in August 2024 that the port "lacked strategic objectives". That label arrived only afterwards, from the Ministry of Defence and seems less like a founding rationale and more of an afterthought, retrofitted to a balance sheet. Both the PIB and the Public-Private Partnership Appraisal Committee (PPPAC) cleared the proposal, yet the PPPAC refused ₹12,230 crore in Viability Gap Funding, telling the Ports Ministry to find the money within its own budget – an unusual rebuke for a venture sold as nationally vital. If the port cannot stand on commercial returns, and if its real purpose is military, the case for a commercial transshipment hub dissolves.

Great Nicobar sits at the southern tip of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago, wrapped in tropical rainforest and ringed by reefs of rare ecological value. The project – port, international airport, power plant and township – would clear vast tracts of that forest, much of it primary, and disturb the nesting beaches of the leatherback turtle and the habitat of the endemic Nicobar megapode. Scientists who have studied the island warn that the loss would be irreversible, and that no afforestation elsewhere can replace what is felled here. The island's indigenous inhabitants have objections of their own, running alongside the ecological ones but not reducible to them. Tribal councils have said that consent was secured without full disclosure, and asked that ancestral land and the resettlement promised after the 2004 tsunami not be overridden by the project. Their criticism is not a refusal of all development. The quarrel is with scale, secrecy and sequence – a project conceived at a magnitude the island cannot absorb. The remedy is transparency. The Centre should release the High-Powered Committee report in full, account openly for the true cost to the public exchequer, and weigh it against an environmental loss that the exchequer can never reimburse. A project of this scale owes the country at least that much.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- Estimated project cost has increased to around ₹91,000 crore.
- Concerns raised over:
  - Strategic rationale of the transshipment port.
  - Economic viability.
  - Environmental degradation.
  - Impact on indigenous communities.
- Highlights the debate between development, national security, and environmental sustainability.

### Key Points

#### Project Components

- International Container Transshipment Terminal (Galathea Bay).
- Greenfield International Airport.
- Power Plant.
- Township and supporting infrastructure.

#### Strategic Significance

- Located near the Malacca Strait.
- Strengthens:
  - Maritime security.
  - Indo-Pacific strategy.
  - SAGAR vision.
  - Blue Economy initiatives.

#### Environmental Concerns

- Diversion of tropical evergreen forests.

- Threat to:
  - Leatherback Sea Turtle.
  - Nicobar Megapode.
  - Coral reefs and mangroves.
- Potential irreversible biodiversity loss.

#### Tribal Concerns

- Affects:
  - Shompen (PVTG).
  - Nicobarese tribe.
- Issues of land rights, livelihood security, and informed consent.

#### Static Linkages

- Indira Point: Southernmost point of India.
- Article 21: Right to life includes environmental protection.
- Article 48A & 51A(g): Environmental protection provisions.
- Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.
- Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- Andaman & Nicobar Command: India's only tri-service command.
- Great Nicobar lies in a seismically active and tsunami-prone zone.

#### Critical Analysis

##### Positives

- Enhances maritime connectivity and trade.
- Strengthens India's strategic presence in the Indo-Pacific.
- Supports naval logistics and surveillance.
- Generates infrastructure and employment.

##### Concerns

- Large-scale forest diversion.
- Threat to endemic species and fragile ecosystems.
- Impact on tribal communities.
- Questions over financial viability.
- Ecological risks in a disaster-prone region.

#### Way Forward

- Ensure transparent environmental assessments.
- Protect tribal rights through informed consultation.
- Adopt phased and sustainable development.
- Integrate disaster-resilient infrastructure.
- Balance strategic needs with ecological conservation.

# Fifteen FTAs, 27 countries, four challenges

WITH THE India-Oman agreement taking effect on June 1, India now has 15 FTAs covering 27 countries. Another nine agreements with 42 countries are nearing completion. Once finalized, India's FTA partners will total 69 countries and could account for nearly 75 per cent of the country's exports. As India expands its network of FTAs, four recurring challenges demand attention: Rising trade deficits, low utilisation of FTA benefits by Indian exporters, worsening inverted duty structures, and the relocation of manufacturing to FTA partner countries.

Let's examine how these challenges are shaping India's trade patterns, industrial competitiveness, and economic outcomes.

First, a rising trade deficit. Between 2007-09 (before the FTAs took effect) and 2022-25, India's trade deficit with ASEAN grew by 88 per cent, that with Japan by 268 per cent and that with South Korea by 268 per cent. In comparison, its trade deficit with the rest of the world increased by 142 per cent. Over the past three years, India's average annual trade deficit with ASEAN, Japan and South Korea has reached about \$62 billion.

The newer FTAs are also associated with large trade deficits. In FY2025, India exported \$48.6 billion to the UAE, Australia, Mauritius and EFTA countries, but imported nearly \$100 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of over \$50 billion. As tariff cuts under these agreements deepen, the deficit may widen further. South Asia remains the major exception, where India's trade surplus expanded from \$6.7 billion to \$20 billion during the same period.

The difference between India's tariff structure and those of FTA partners helps explain why imports often grow faster than exports after FTAs. Most of the FTA partners are already open economies with low tariffs. Average MFN tariffs are close to zero in Singapore and below 4 per cent in Japan, Australia, Malaysia and the UAE. In contrast, India's trade-weighted MFN tariff is about 12.6 per cent, rising to over 20 per cent for 350 per cent. As a result, when India cuts tariffs under an FTA, exporters from partner countries gain a significant price advantage in the Indian market. A 50 per cent tariff reduction, for example, can translate into a major cost advantage over competing suppliers. Indian exporters, however, often gain little additional market access because tariffs in partner countries were already low or zero before the agreement.

The difference becomes even clearer when actual trade flows are examined. Almost all imports into Singapore enter duty-free under MFN rules, while more than 80 per cent do so in Japan and Malaysia. In the EU and the UK, more than half of imports face zero customs duty. In India, however, only about 6 per cent of imports enter duty-free under MFN treatment. As a result, FTAs often give foreign exporters a much bigger advantage in the Indian market than Indian exporters receive abroad.

Second, low utilisation of FTA benefits. The same tariff asymmetry also helps explain why Indian exporters make limited use of FTAs. When MFN tariffs in partner countries are already zero, there is little benefit in exporting under an FTA. Even when MFN tariffs are low—say 10-13 per cent—the savings are often too small to justify the cost of complying with rules of origin, certification requirements, and paperwork. As a result, only an estimated 20-30 per cent of India's eligible exports take advantage of FTA preferences. Many small firms prefer to avoid the compliance burden for modest tariff savings.

The third challenge is the relocation of manufacturing to FTA partners. Since India's MFN tariffs remain

relatively high, tariff reductions under FTAs can generate a substantial savings. As a result, import-side utilisation rates are estimated at 60-70 per cent. Thus, rising imports and low export-side utilisation are not separate issues. Both stem from the same tariff asymmetry between India and its FTA partners.

Third, worsening inverted duty structures. An inverted duty structure arises when duties on raw materials and industrial inputs are higher than those on finished products. While this problem has existed for years, FTAs have made it harder to fix because many finished goods now enter India at low or zero duty from partners such as ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, the UAE and Australia. As a result, Indian manufacturers often pay high duties on imported inputs, especially those sourced from non-FTA countries, while competing against finished products imported duty-free under FTAs.

For example, steel and aluminium attract MFN duties of 7.5-10 per cent, but machinery, industrial equipment and engineering products made from these materials can enter India duty-free under several FTAs. Indian manufacturers, therefore, face higher input costs when competing with tariff-free imported machinery produced with globally priced inputs.

Similar distortions exist in chemicals, plastics, rubber and textiles. Duties on inputs such as caustic soda, soda ash, polypropylene, PVC and SBR raise production costs. At the same time, many finished products in these sectors can be imported at low or zero duty. The result is a tariff structure that protects producers of basic materials but disadvantages downstream manufacturing, making it harder to achieve higher domestic value addition and the goals of Make in India.

Fourth, make in ASEAN, sell in



AJAY SRIVASTAVA

India. An equally significant consequence of FTAs and resulting inverted duty structures is the growing incentive for firms to manufacture outside India rather than within it. When raw materials and components attract duties in India, but finished products can be imported duty-free from FTA partners, companies may find it more profitable to locate production abroad and export back to the Indian market. In such cases, FTAs effectively encourage offshore manufacturing at the expense of domestic value addition.

ASEAN countries are increasingly becoming manufacturing hubs for supplying the Indian market. Chinese companies have invested heavily in countries such as Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia. At the same time, some Indian firms have also set up factories and joint ventures there to benefit from lower production costs and duty-free access to India under FTAs. Similar trends can be seen in electronics, steel, chemicals, plastics, consumer goods and engineering products.

When it becomes cheaper to manufacture in an ASEAN country and export duty-free to India than to produce in India, investment and jobs tend to move abroad. As a result, FTAs can encourage firms to "Make in ASEAN, Sell in India" rather than "Make in India".

Unless India's tariffs on industrial inputs are better aligned with its FTA commitments, these agreements may encourage firms to produce abroad rather than in India, weakening domestic manufacturing and supply chains.

The government and industry must work together to address these four challenges so that FTAs strengthen India's manufacturing base instead of encouraging higher imports, overseas production, and loss of industrial capacity.

The writer is founder, GTR

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS: Context of the News

- The India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) came into force on 1 June 2026.
- India currently has 15 FTAs covering 27 countries, and negotiations for 9 more agreements involving 42 countries are underway.
- Once finalized, FTA partner countries could account for nearly 75% of India's exports.
- However, concerns have emerged regarding rising trade deficits, low utilisation of FTA benefits, and challenges to domestic manufacturing.

## Key Points

### Rising Trade Deficit

- India's trade deficit with major FTA partners has increased significantly:
  - ASEAN: 381%
  - Japan: 318%
  - South Korea: 268%
- Average annual trade deficit with these partners is around US\$ 62 billion.
- In FY2025, India recorded a trade deficit of over US\$ 50 billion with UAE, Australia, Mauritius and EFTA countries combined.

### Tariff Asymmetry

- India's trade-weighted MFN tariff is around 12.6%.
- Most FTA partners maintain much lower tariff levels:
  - Singapore: Near zero
  - Japan, Australia, Malaysia and UAE: Below 4%
- Consequently, tariff reductions provide greater market access to foreign exporters in India than to Indian exporters abroad.

### Low Utilisation of FTAs

- Only 20-30% of eligible Indian exports utilise FTA preferences.
- Major reasons:
  - Complex Rules of Origin requirements
  - Certification procedures
  - Compliance costs
  - Lack of awareness among MSMEs
- Import utilisation rates are estimated at 60-70%.

### Inverted Duty Structure

- Higher duties on raw materials and intermediates than on finished products.
- Example:
  - Steel and aluminium attract duties.
  - Finished machinery often enters India duty-free under FTAs.
- This increases domestic production costs and reduces competitiveness.

### Manufacturing Relocation

- Many firms are increasingly locating production in ASEAN countries such as:
  - Vietnam
  - Thailand
  - Indonesia
- Benefits include lower production costs and duty-free access to India.
- This creates a trend of "Make in ASEAN, Sell in India" instead of "Make in India".

### Significance

- FTAs promote trade integration and export diversification.
- Improve access to international markets.
- Encourage foreign investment and technology transfer.
- Help integrate India into Global Value Chains (GVCs).
- Strengthen India's economic and strategic partnerships.

### Static Linkages

- Free Trade Agreement (FTA)
- Most Favoured Nation (MFN) Principle
- Rules of Origin
- Trade Balance and Current Account Deficit
- Inverted Duty Structure
- Comparative Advantage Theory
- Global Value Chains (GVCs)
- WTO - GATT Article XXIV
- Make in India Initiative
- Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme

## Critical Analysis

### Advantages

- Expands export opportunities.
- Attracts FDI and technology.
- Enhances global economic integration.
- Provides access to cheaper inputs and products.

### Challenges

- Persistent trade deficits with FTA partners.
- Low utilisation of negotiated benefits by Indian exporters.
- Inverted duty structures affecting domestic manufacturing.
- Relocation of production and investments outside India.
- Potential loss of jobs and domestic value addition.

## Way Forward

- Rationalise tariffs on industrial inputs.
- Simplify Rules of Origin and certification procedures.
- Increase FTA awareness among exporters and MSMEs.
- Align trade policy with industrial policy objectives.
- Strengthen manufacturing competitiveness through PLI and logistics reforms.
- Conduct periodic reviews of FTA outcomes and sectoral impacts.

# On India's EV transition, it's time to shift gears



LAVEESH BHANDARI

**P**OLLUTION KILLS. It is harmful to India's reputation as a dynamic, forward-looking society, and, where vehicular pollution is concerned, the better-off pollute more, whereas the worse-off suffer more. The auto industry has historically tended to oppose policies aimed at reducing fossil-fuel vehicles due to fears of revenue losses and the cost burden of moving to new technologies. Fear of new competitors with a technological advantage may be another factor.

Such challenges will remain whether we switch now or 10 years later, and policymakers must ask: How long should the government wait? It is now time for the government to institute a comprehensive policy for a move towards electric vehicles (EVs) for both two- and four-wheelers by 2028. And in parallel, implement a plan to install the required charging points in parking lots, petrol pumps, and public spaces across the country.

The belief that such a policy will make India dependent on China is deeply flawed. First, India is a large two- and three-wheeler market. But Delhi, where EV sales are being mandated, accounts for less than 4 per cent of the national market, and therefore, the changeover will cause minimal damage to the two-wheeler economy.

Second, EVs, in fact, reduce India's global vulnerabilities, whereas fossil-fuel vehicles increase them. Why? Because batteries and magnets are not consumables, even if their imports stop, EVs already on the road will continue to operate; this is not the case with fossil-fuel-driven vehicles.

Third, India has a mechanism for keeping petroleum stockpiles, and it can do the same for rare earths or critical minerals. Indeed, India's National Critical Mineral Mission envisages precisely this. The Indian government highlighted in the 2026-27 budget its efforts to enhance access to critical minerals and rare earths. These efforts will need domestic demand to succeed.

Yet another concern is the potential loss of jobs associated with the repair and maintenance of fossil-fuel-driven vehicles. Here as well, the government is proposing to

stop the registration of new vehicles after 2028. All the older vehicles will continue to need the services of such mechanics. Moreover, new EVs will also create jobs for other services. Remember the concerns that accompanied computerisation in banking?

It is also sometimes argued that EVs, despite government subsidies, are more expensive and therefore delivery workers, own-account workers and others dependent on two- and three-wheelers will end up paying more. To the contrary, analysis conducted at CSEEP has shown that the lifetime costs of electric two-wheelers are significantly lower than their petrol counterparts, and in fact, these workers will gain from the switch to EVs. The higher purchase cost, if a real concern, can be addressed through slight tweaks to the government's collateral-free credit programs. The gig-work economy has already embraced electric two-wheelers.

Any policy change results in a diverse set of winners and losers. But imaginative and cooperative actions can create win-win solutions. The Indian automobile sector includes some of the most respected firms in India. And these firms can and must come up with a forward-looking and solution-oriented plan.

They will no doubt face stranded assets as production lines shift from internal combustion engine vehicles to electric vehicles. For this, they could ask the government for accelerated depreciation. Dependence on China is a concern, and the industry needs to ramp up R&D spending for that.

The industry could also work with the government on interim stockpiling solutions. It should be proposing innovative ideas for ramping up charging facilities; bringing utility companies into the conversation would help, since they would be a major gainer. Reuse and recycling of batteries is another challenge area, and here as well, there are many ways in which the industry can use its extensive networks to support the government's efforts.

India needs to change, but this would be best achieved when industry and government are able to create a collaborative and socially oriented relationship.

Bhandari heads CSEEP. Views are personal

EVs, in fact, reduce India's global vulnerabilities, whereas fossil fuel vehicles increase them. Why? Because batteries and magnets are not consumables, even if their imports stop, EVs already on the road will continue to operate

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context

- Rising vehicular pollution and its adverse impact on public health have strengthened calls for a faster transition to Electric Vehicles (EVs).
- Discussions have emerged on phasing out registration of new fossil-fuel vehicles and expanding EV charging infrastructure.
- Concerns relate to critical mineral dependence, industrial transition, and employment impacts.
- The debate aligns with India's climate commitments, energy security objectives, and clean mobility initiatives.

### Key Points

- Transport sector is a major contributor to urban air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.
- EVs have lower lifetime operating costs than conventional vehicles.
- Electrification of India's large two-wheeler and three-wheeler market can significantly reduce emissions.
- EV adoption can reduce dependence on imported crude oil.
- Battery manufacturing, recycling, and critical mineral supply chains are emerging strategic sectors.

- Government initiatives:
  - PM E-DRIVE Scheme
  - PLI Scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cells (ACC)
  - National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP)
  - National Critical Mineral Mission

### Static Linkages

- Polluter Pays Principle
- Sustainable Development
- Energy Security
- Circular Economy
- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)
- Just Transition for workers affected by technological change

### Critical Analysis

#### Advantages

- Reduces air pollution and public health burden.
- Lowers crude oil import dependence.
- Supports climate change mitigation goals.
- Promotes indigenous manufacturing and innovation.
- Reduces operational costs for transport users.

#### Challenges

- Inadequate charging infrastructure.
- Dependence on imported critical minerals.
- High upfront cost of EVs.
- Potential job displacement in traditional automobile sectors.
- Battery recycling and disposal challenges.

### Way Forward

- Develop a clear EV transition roadmap.
- Expand charging infrastructure nationwide.
- Strengthen domestic critical mineral supply chains.
- Promote battery recycling and circular economy practices.
- Support R&D in advanced battery technologies.
- Provide reskilling opportunities for affected workers.
- Encourage public-private partnerships in EV ecosystem development.

## After 100 days of conflict, a backsliding

ONE HUNDRED days into the West Asia conflict, Iran and Israel have exchanged fire for the first time since a fragile ceasefire took effect on April 8. The escalation was hardly unexpected. Tehran has long insisted that any ceasefire must include an end to Israel's bombing campaign in Lebanon. That is something Donald Trump has also pursued publicly, and evidently unsuccessfully. The latest flare-up began after Iran fired ballistic missiles at northern Israel on Sunday in retaliation for Israeli strikes on southern Beirut. Israel responded with attacks on targets in central and western Iran. The renewed hostilities threaten to unravel the progress that had been made in the US-Iran talks, further narrowing the limited space for diplomacy that had opened up over the past two months.

The US President, who has demanded that Iran and Israel "immediately stop shooting", finds himself trapped between a recalcitrant rival and an intransigent ally. Iran sees its control of the Strait of Hormuz as a source of leverage to extract concessions, while Israel remains unwilling to compromise on the Hezbollah threat. Domestic political considerations further complicate matters: In all three countries, two of which face critical elections in the coming months, any compromise risks being portrayed as capitulation at home. Even as a section of public opinion in the US has turned sharply against Israel, the political establishment remains committed to supporting it unconditionally. Trump cannot afford to be seen as abandoning Israel, but he must also contend with the prospect of higher energy prices and supply-chain disruptions. Netanyahu, meanwhile, depends for his political survival on his hard-right coalition — after Iran's offensive, one minister declared that "Tehran must burn". How Trump balances these competing forces will determine when the shooting stops and diplomacy gets another chance.

Even before the return to kinetic action, the US and Iran remained far apart on a deal because their core demands — on nuclear weapons, sanctions, regional proxies and frozen assets — have been fundamentally irreconcilable. Deep mutual distrust, compounded by the absence of meaningful direct contact between Tehran and Washington since the Islamabad meeting in April, means that even if Trump succeeds in securing a de-escalation, the region is likely to remain trapped in a state of no-war, no-peace, with continuing consequences for the world economy. For India, a second increase in domestic LPG prices in three months, as oil companies continue to grapple with surging energy costs, is a reminder that the conflict in West Asia is not a distant one.

### KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

#### Context

- A fragile ceasefire in the West Asia conflict has broken down following renewed military exchanges between Iran and Israel.
- Iran launched ballistic missile attacks on northern Israel in response to Israeli strikes in Beirut.
- Israel retaliated with attacks inside Iran.
- The escalation threatens ongoing US-Iran diplomatic engagement on the nuclear issue.
- Rising tensions have renewed concerns over disruptions in global energy supplies, particularly through the Strait of Hormuz.

#### Key Points

- Iran considers control over the Strait of Hormuz a strategic leverage.
- Israel continues its hardline stance against Hezbollah and other Iran-backed groups.
- The US is attempting to balance support for Israel with regional stability.
- Major issues in US-Iran negotiations:
  - Nuclear programme
  - Economic sanctions
  - Regional proxy groups
  - Frozen Iranian assets
- Political compulsions in all three countries have reduced the scope for compromise.
- Escalation may lead to:
  - Higher crude oil prices
  - Supply-chain disruptions
  - Global inflationary pressures

#### Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most important oil transit chokepoints.
- West Asia is critical for India's energy security.
- Energy price shocks affect:
  - Current Account Deficit (CAD)
  - Inflation
  - Fiscal stability
  - Exchange rate management
- Maritime security and freedom of navigation are essential for global trade.
- Strategic chokepoints often influence geopolitical stability and economic security.

#### Critical Analysis

##### Concerns

- Increased risk of a wider regional conflict.
- Weakening prospects of a US-Iran nuclear understanding.
- Threat to global energy security.
- Potential disruption of international shipping routes.
- Increased volatility in global financial markets.

##### Implications for India

- Higher crude oil import bill.
- Inflationary pressures due to rising fuel prices.
- Impact on trade with West Asian countries.
- Concerns regarding the safety of the Indian diaspora in the region.
- Pressure on energy and economic security.

#### Way Forward

- Support diplomatic efforts for de-escalation.
- Diversify crude oil import sources.
- Strengthen Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR).
- Accelerate renewable energy and green hydrogen initiatives.
- Enhance maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Maintain a balanced and strategic engagement with all stakeholders in West Asia.\

# In law, need to write a new marriage story

**T**HE SUPREME Court saying that keeping alive a marriage which is "already decayed and is decomposing day by day" serves neither the couple nor society is an important intervention in what is often one of the most bitter and wearying legal processes. The two-judge bench that was ruling on the case of a couple that has been living separately for 15 years said that asking them to live together after they've been estranged for so long would amount to "cruelty to both the parties". In thus framing the issue, the Court has underlined the need for a more nuanced approach to the complex issue of marital breakdown.

While the laws in their present form offer two paths to legal separation — mutual consent (no-fault) and contested (fault-based) — the Supreme Court has periodically used its extraordinary powers under Article 142 (1) to widen the framework of divorce and bring in the concept of "irretrievable breakdown of marriage" (IBM). In 2006, while ruling on *Naveen Kohli vs Neelu Kohli*, it urged the government to "seriously consider bringing an amendment in the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 to incorporate irretrievable breakdown of marriage as a ground for the grant of divorce". The concerns animating the Court cannot be dismissed: A protracted legal battle can take a toll on the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of the parties involved. The financial implications, too, are often serious. As the Court has rightly said, to prolong an estranged couple's agony because their case does not meet the criteria laid out in the law amounts to "perpetuity of marriage on paper".

The judgment serves as a reminder to both the government and Parliament that reform is long overdue. In its 2009 report, the Law Commission recommended the inclusion of IBM, and subsequently, there were two attempts at legislative reform via the Marriage Laws (Amendment) Bills of 2010 and 2013, both of which lapsed. At the same time, reform cannot overlook the realities of a deeply patriarchal society where women often enter divorce proceedings from a position of social and economic disadvantage. Protecting their interests, especially on the questions of property rights, custody, maintenance and residential rights, is paramount. Reform is necessary, but it should not become another instrument for perpetuating inequality.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Context of the News

- The Supreme Court recently dissolved a marriage where the couple had been living separately for nearly 15 years.
- The Court observed that keeping a "dead marriage" alive serves neither the individuals nor society.
- It held that compelling estranged spouses to continue a legal relationship despite prolonged separation amounts to cruelty.
- The judgment once again highlighted the concept of Irretrievable Breakdown of Marriage (IBM) and the need for legislative reforms in divorce laws.
- The Court exercised its powers under Article 142 to grant complete justice despite the absence of IBM as a statutory ground for divorce.

### Key Points

- Irretrievable Breakdown of Marriage (IBM): A situation where a marriage has collapsed beyond repair and there is no possibility of reconciliation.
- Presently, divorce under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 can be obtained through:
  - Mutual Consent Divorce (No-fault divorce)
  - Contested Divorce (Fault-based grounds such as cruelty, desertion, adultery, etc.)
- IBM is not yet a statutory ground for divorce in India.

- In *Naveen Kohli v. Neelu Kohli* (2006), the Supreme Court recommended incorporating IBM into the Hindu Marriage Act.
- In *Shilpa Sailesh v. Varun Sreenivasan* (2023), a Constitution Bench held that the Supreme Court can dissolve marriages under Article 142 on the ground of irretrievable breakdown.
- The Law Commission of India (71st Report, 1978 and 217th Report, 2009) recommended introducing IBM as a ground for divorce.
- Attempts through the Marriage Laws (Amendment) Bills, 2010 and 2013 lapsed without enactment.

### Static Linkages

- Article 142: Power of the Supreme Court to do "complete justice."
- Article 21: Right to life and personal liberty includes dignity and mental well-being.
- Directive Principle under Article 39: Protection of family and social justice.
- Hindu Marriage Act, 1955.
- Special Marriage Act, 1954.
- Constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination.
- Law Commission reports as instruments of legal reform.
- Judicial activism and separation of powers.

### Why is it Important?

#### In Favour

- Reduces prolonged matrimonial litigation.
- Protects mental and emotional well-being of spouses.
- Recognizes social realities of failed marriages.
- Promotes dignity and personal liberty.

#### Concerns

- May disadvantage economically dependent spouses, especially women.
- Lack of clear provisions regarding matrimonial property division.
- Potential misuse by stronger spouses to evade responsibilities.
- Need for safeguards relating to maintenance, custody, and residence rights.

#### Challenges

- Absence of a statutory framework for IBM.
- Inadequate protection of women's economic rights after divorce.
- Delays in family court proceedings.
- Balancing family stability with individual autonomy.

### Way Forward

- Enact legislation recognizing IBM as a ground for divorce.
- Strengthen provisions on maintenance, alimony, and matrimonial property rights.
- Ensure gender-sensitive safeguards.
- Promote mediation and counseling before dissolution.
- Prioritize welfare of children in custody matters.