

DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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Walking on footpath is a fundamental right, says SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday, in a judgment, declared the freedom to walk on demarcated and well-maintained footpaths a fundamental right which has priority over movement by motorised vehicles. The court highlighted the need to lay down a statutory framework, not only for declaring the right to walk a fundamental right, but also to recognise the duty-bearers.

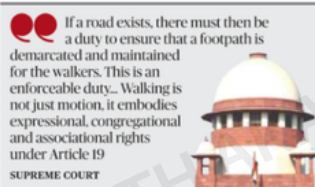
"If a road exists, there must then be a duty to ensure that a footpath is demarcated and maintained for the walkers. This is an enforceable duty. The fundamental right to walk on demarcated footpaths shall override the privilege of a motorised vehicle," Justice P.S. Narasimha, who authored the judgment, held.

The judgment came in a case of the death of a five-year-old boy who was crushed to death by a truck while walking to school with his father. The court found that the parent was entitled to compensation of over ₹11 lakh.

'Most basic of rights'
Justice Narasimha said walking safely and carefree along footpaths, without danger lurking at every turn, was the most basic of rights. "It is the simplest of the human activity, inextricably connected to life."

The court said the Constitution recognised and guaranteed walking as a fundamental right in its words, "All citizens shall have the right... to move freely throughout the territory of India".

But over the years, demands of trade and urbanisation have relegated walking to an inconvenience. Governments and local bodies paralleled wide roads and expressways to growth, building motorways while leaving



little space for walking, the court said.

"It could also be elitist to start with, for machines with wheels were only for the rich, but as economies progressed and cheaper motor vehicles were introduced, the entire spectrum of motorised transportation dominated the roads, pushed aside the walkers to the extent that they are treated as a nuisance for the drivers who routinely run over the walkers and their footpaths. This should stop from now on as we declare the fundamental right to walk on demarcated footpaths alongside motorised roads," the top court said.

"Walking is a struggle for the not-so-fortunate, meditation in motion for many, resistance for others, discovery for the inquisitive, a cohesive strategy for sharp socio-political minds. It certainly did inspire and ignite some of the ideals of the freedom struggle... In that sense, walking is not just motion, it certainly embodies expressional, congregational and associational rights under Article 19(1)(a), Article 19(1)(b) and Article 19(1)(c)," Justice Narasimha said. Common spaces must not be the monopoly of motorised vehicles. The freedom to walk, subject to reasonable restrictions, also deserved ample space.

"In reality, how much does it take to create a well-demarcated footpath wherever a road exists? All that the fundamental right to

walk demands is a comfortable space for an easy and carefree walk. Should this not be the minimum of the minimum duty that a municipal authority owes to the citizens?" the top court asked the government.

Regulatory body

It said that the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, had never bothered to recognise the fundamental right to walk. The Supreme Court also highlighted that the proposed Act must protect, enhance, and provide quick remedies for violations, and also establish a full-time regulator to plan, enforce, and implement the right to walk.

"To enhance and effectuate the fundamental right to walk on demarcated footpaths, it is necessary to establish a regulatory body... Institutional expertise is critical, and such a regulator will employ human resources with domain expertise and talent," Justice Narasimha said. The court directed its Registry to send a copy of the judgment to the Ministries of Housing and Urban Affairs, Rural Development, Road Transport and Highways, to "reflect on the compelling necessity for initiating the necessary legal framework".

The Justice also said Constitutional courts were also obliged to declare and reiterate the right to walk as a fundamental right.

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- Public spaces cannot be monopolized by motorized vehicles.
- The Court suggested:
 - A dedicated legislation on pedestrian rights.
 - Establishment of a specialized regulatory authority.
 - Quick grievance-redress mechanisms for violations.
- The judgment expands the scope of rights-based urban governance and sustainable mobility.

Static Linkages

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 19(1)(d) – Freedom to move freely throughout the territory of India.
- Article 21 – Protection of Life and Personal Liberty.
- Article 32 – Constitutional Remedies.
- Article 38 – Promotion of welfare of the people.
- Article 39(e) – Protection of health and strength of citizens.
- Article 47 – Improvement of public health.

Local Governance

- 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 Constitutional status to Urban Local Bodies.
- Twelfth Schedule Urban planning.
- Roads and bridges.
- Public amenities.
- Urban infrastructure.

Related Legislations

- Motor Vehicles Act, 1988
- Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (Accessibility in public infrastructure)

Value Addition for Mains

Judicial Expansion of Fundamental Rights under Article 21

The Supreme Court has expanded Article 21 to include:

- Right to Privacy (K.S. Puttaswamy Case)
- Right to Clean Environment
- Right to Livelihood
- Right to Shelter
- Right to Education (before Article 21A)
- Right to Legal Aid
- Right to Health
- Right to Safe Mobility (present judgment)

Significance

Governance

- Strengthens citizen-centric urban governance.
- Imposes accountability on municipal bodies.

Social Justice

- Benefits:
 - Children
 - Elderly
 - Women
 - Persons with Disabilities
 - Urban Poor

Sustainable Development

- Encourages non-motorized transport.
- Reduces dependence on private vehicles.
- Supports climate-resilient urban planning.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Supreme Court (Justice P.S. Narasimha) declared the Right to Walk on demarcated and well-maintained footpaths as a Fundamental Right.
- Judgment arose from a case involving the death of a five-year-old child in a road accident while walking to school.
- The Court held that the right of pedestrians overrides the privilege of motorized vehicles on public roads.
- The Court directed the Union Government to consider a legal framework for protecting pedestrian rights and establishing a regulatory mechanism.

Key Points

- Safe walking on demarcated footpaths is an essential component of:
 - Article 21 (Right to Life and Dignity)
 - Article 19(1)(d) (Freedom of Movement)
- The Court emphasized that:
 - Every road should have a properly demarcated footpath.
 - Municipal authorities have an enforceable duty to provide and maintain footpaths.

Road Safety

- India records one of the world's highest road accident fatalities.
- Improved pedestrian infrastructure can reduce road deaths.

Challenges

- Encroachment of footpaths.
- Poor urban planning.
- Weak municipal capacity.
- Lack of dedicated pedestrian laws.
- Funding constraints for urban local bodies.
- Fragmented responsibility among agencies.

Way Forward

- Enact a dedicated Pedestrian Rights Law.
- Adopt "Complete Streets" approach.
- Mandatory pedestrian audits in cities.
- Universal accessibility standards.
- Strengthen urban local body finances.
- Integrate pedestrian infrastructure under:
 - Smart Cities Mission
 - AMRUT
 - PM Gati Shakti
- Establish independent urban mobility regulators.

HC upholds curbs on Telegram amid NEET row

The definition of 'information' in IT Act includes software and programmes, says Delhi High Court

Centre followed Section 69A of IT Act and gave reasons for using emergency powers, says court

Centre's pleas that channel-specific takedowns on Telegram had failed were accepted by the HC

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday upheld the Centre's temporary ban on messaging platform Telegram, noting that the government's action was proportionate and justified in view of the alleged use of the platform by organised cheating networks linked to the NEET (UG), 2026, controversy.

Dismissing Telegram's challenge to the June 16 emergency blocking order, the court found that the Union government had followed the procedure prescribed under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act and had recorded

adequate reasons for invoking its emergency powers.

A significant aspect of the ruling is the court's endorsement of the government's interpretation of Section 69A.

'Entire platform'
Rejecting Telegram's argument that the provision permits blocking only specific content and not an entire platform, the court held that the Act's broad definition of "information" encompasses software and computer programmes.

Since Telegram functions through software infrastructure constituting a "computer resource", the government was legally empowered to direct a

Court's endorsement

What the Delhi High Court said in the Telegram case

Centre empowered under Section 69A of the IT Act to restrict "entire platform" access

Govt. order not disproportionate as efforts to restrict through channel-specific take-downs failed

Centre has cited circulation of purported examination papers and fraudulent activities targeting students as reason

Temporary restrictions were proportionate to the objective of preventing misinformation and criminal activity

temporary block on the platform, the court said.

"An application or platform performs logical, arithmetic and memory functions through electronic, magnetic or optical impulses, and includes input, output, processing,

storage, computer software and communication facilities connected with a computer system or computer network," the court said adding that it is of the view that Respondent No.1 was empowered under Section 69A of the IT Act to

issue directions for blocking public access to Telegram," it said.

The court rejected Telegram's contention that the order reflected non-application of mind. The court observed that the government had specifically cited the circulation of purported examination papers, fraudulent activities targeting students and the inability of existing measures to curb recurring violations.

Accepting the Centre's argument that repeated attempts to tackle the problem through channel-specific takedowns on Telegram had failed, the court said, "The government's measures are least restrictive. It cannot be

held that the order is disproportionate."

According to material placed before the government, operators of fraudulent networks were routinely creating mirror channels, backup groups and successor accounts after enforcement action, rendering targeted removals ineffective, the court said. The judgment noted that authorities had concluded that "nothing short of a platform-level measure" would protect the integrity of the examination during the critical period preceding the June 21 re-test.

Telegram had argued that it was being unfairly singled out while other social media platforms continued to operate. The company told the court that it had cooperated with authorities, removed flagged content within hours, and had taken down over 900 links related to unlawful NEET content using a combination of artificial intelligence tools and manual moderation.

However, the court held that the emergent circumstances surrounding the NEET-UG controversy justified the government's intervention and that the temporary restrictions were proportionate to the objective of preventing misinformation and criminal activity.

RELATED REPORT ON
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Static Linkages

Information Technology Act, 2000

- Principal legislation governing cyberspace in India.
- Provides legal framework for:
 - Electronic records
 - Cyber offences
 - Intermediary regulation
 - Blocking powers of government

Section 69A

- Empowers the Central Government to block public access to information through any computer resource.
- Grounds:
 - Sovereignty and Integrity of India
 - Defence of India
 - Security of State
 - Friendly Relations with Foreign States
 - Public Order
 - Prevention of incitement to cognizable offences

Important Judicial Precedent

Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015)

- Section 66A → Struck Down.
- Section 69A → Upheld as constitutionally valid.

Constitutional Principles

- Article 14 – Equality before Law.
- Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of Speech and Expression.
- Article 19(2) – Reasonable Restrictions.
- Doctrine of Proportionality.
- Judicial Review.

Significance

- Highlights challenges posed by digital platforms in competitive examinations.
- Demonstrates use of emergency powers under cyber laws.
- Reinforces importance of maintaining integrity of public examinations.
- Illustrates balancing of digital freedoms and public interest.

Concerns

- Impact on legitimate users of digital platforms.
- Questions regarding extent of platform-level restrictions.
- Balancing freedom of expression with public order.
- Increasing sophistication of cyber-enabled examination fraud.

Way Forward

- Strengthen cybersecurity architecture of public examinations.
- Improve coordination between NTA, CERT-In and law-enforcement agencies.
- Develop AI-based fraud detection mechanisms.
- Ensure transparent application of blocking powers.
- Strengthen anti-paper leak and examination security protocols.
- Enhance digital governance and accountability mechanisms.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Delhi High Court upheld the Centre's temporary blocking of Telegram under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000.
- The action was linked to the alleged use of Telegram channels for circulation of leaked NEET-UG 2026 examination material and operation of organised cheating networks.
- The Court held that repeated content-specific takedowns had failed due to creation of mirror channels and backup groups.
- Separately, the Supreme Court declined an urgent hearing on petitions challenging the NEET-UG 2026 re-test scheduled on 21 June 2026.
- The original examination was cancelled following allegations of a nationwide paper leak.

Key Highlights

Delhi High Court Judgment

- Upheld emergency blocking order issued by the Central Government.
- Held that Telegram falls within the scope of a computer resource under the IT Act.
- Accepted that platform-level blocking may be justified in exceptional circumstances.
- Observed that the measure satisfied the test of proportionality.

Government's Stand

- Channel-specific removals were ineffective.
- Fraudulent networks repeatedly created:
 - Mirror channels
 - Backup groups
 - Successor accounts
- Temporary platform-level restriction was considered necessary to maintain examination integrity.

NEET-UG 2026

- Conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA).
- Cancelled due to alleged paper leak.
- Investigation entrusted to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).
- Approximately 22 lakh candidates affected.

Four glacial lakes in Arunachal have expanded in a decade: study

Analysis by geospatial intelligence firm shows that the 'high-risk' lakes have increased in area, with one of them growing by 10 hectares; expert says expansion warrants attention but should not be interpreted as evidence of an impending disaster

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

A satellite-based assessment of five glacial lakes in the Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh has found that four have expanded over the last decade, with one lake showing rapid growth, adding fresh evidence to concerns over the threat posed by Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) in the eastern Himalaya.

The analysis – a report and not a peer-reviewed study – conducted by the Noida-based geospatial intelligence firm Suhora Technologies, examined five lakes in the Mago Chu basin that have been classified by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) as “high risk” or “very high risk”.

The assessment comes amid heightened attention on glacial hazards in the region following a recent risk evaluation by the Centre for Earth Sciences and Himalayan Studies (CESHS), Arunachal Pradesh.

Using imagery from ICEYE, PlanetScope, and LISS-IV satellites, Suhora compared the extent of the lakes between 2016 and June 2026. In a press state-



A new satellite study has flagged the importance of continuous monitoring of high-risk glacial lakes in Arunachal Pradesh. (PI)

ment, the company said that “four out of five lakes have expanded, reflecting a general trend of glacial retreat and meltwater storage”. However, it cautioned that “lake expansion does not directly indicate a flood event” and said the findings instead highlighted “the importance of regular monitoring and further assessment to better understand future risks”.

High-risk lakes

Among the lakes analysed, Sanhapo Lake showed the most significant growth. Suhora estimated its area at 78.07 hectares in 2016, increasing to 88.81 hectares by mid-June 2026. The company said that

while uncertainties remain regarding its historical extent because of ice cover visible in its 2016 imagery, the lake has exhibited sustained expansion in recent years. Given its size and continued growth, Suhora identified it as the highest-priority lake among those assessed for detailed hazard modelling, continuous monitoring and possible early-warning systems.

The remaining lakes showed more modest changes. Two lakes categorised by the NDMA as “very high risk” expanded by about a hectare over the decade, while Dharuka Tso, listed as “high risk”, also recorded gradual growth. A fifth lake remained broadly stable over

the observation period.

Amit Kumar, co-founder and chief operating officer of Suhora Technologies, said satellite observations were increasingly important for monitoring remote mountain regions where field access was often difficult. “By comparing satellite imagery across multiple years, it is possible to track changes in glacial lake extent...with the monsoon season approaching, continuous observation of glacial lakes becomes increasingly important”, he added.

Anil Kulkarni, glaciologist and distinguished fellow at the Divecha Centre for Climate Change, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru and who wasn't connected to the study, said the observed expansion warranted attention but should not be interpreted as evidence of an impending disaster.

“If lakes are expanding, then it is considered as an unstable lake,” he said. However, he stressed that the key question was why a lake was growing. Lakes impounded by moraines – ridges of rock and debris deposited by glaciers – can become hazardous when retreating glaciers increase the volume of water

trapped behind them. Yet several other factors determine risk, including the possibility of landslides, avalanches or rockfalls entering the lake.

“Mere increase in area, even over a decade, cannot be a single criterion” for judging how dangerous a lake is, Mr. Kulkarni told *The Hindu*. “It can be a concern, but how risky it is, we do not know”.

Concerns over floods

Worries over Himalayan glacial hazards have intensified since the October 2023 disaster in Sikkim, when a breach associated with South Lhonak Lake triggered floods that killed dozens of people and destroyed the Chungthang hydropower dam. GLOFs can occur when natural moraine dams fail or when large avalanches, landslides, or icefalls suddenly displace water and generate destructive waves.

Mr. Kulkarni said India's ability to identify potentially dangerous glacial lakes had improved considerably through satellite monitoring and modelling. However, he argued that translating scientific assessments into practical risk reduction remained a major challenge.

- Moraine = accumulation of glacial debris deposited by glaciers.
- GLOF = sudden release of water from a glacial lake.
- Remote Sensing and GIS are major tools for disaster monitoring.
- SAR satellites can monitor terrain irrespective of cloud cover and daylight.
- Climate change accelerates glacier retreat and glacial lake formation.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Satellite-based assessment of 5 glacial lakes in the Mago Chu Basin, Tawang (Arunachal Pradesh).
- Conducted using ICEYE, PlanetScope and LISS-IV satellite imagery.
- Lakes are categorized as High Risk/Very High Risk by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).
- 4 out of 5 lakes expanded between 2016 and 2026.
- Sanhapo Lake recorded the highest expansion.
- Raises concerns regarding Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) in the Eastern Himalayas.

Key Points

- Location: Tawang District, Arunachal Pradesh.
- River System: Brahmaputra Basin.
- Most Expanding Lake: Sanhapo Lake.
- Assessment Period: 2016–2026.
- Observation: Expansion linked to glacier retreat and increased meltwater storage.
 - Risk Factors: Moraine dam failure
 - Avalanches
 - Landslides
 - Rockfalls
 - Icefalls
 - Extreme rainfall events
- Recent Example: South Lhonak Lake GLOF, Sikkim (2023).

Static Linkages

- Himalayas are known as the Third Pole.
- Glaciers act as freshwater reservoirs.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Enables monitoring of inaccessible Himalayan regions.
- Supports early warning mechanisms.
- Helps identify vulnerable glacial lakes.
- Improves disaster preparedness.

Concerns

- Lake expansion alone cannot predict GLOFs.
- Lack of continuous ground verification.
- Increasing vulnerability of downstream settlements and infrastructure.
- Extreme weather events may intensify risks.

Challenges

- Difficult terrain.
- Limited monitoring infrastructure.
- Inadequate community preparedness.
- Data gaps in high-altitude regions.

Way Forward

- Establish real-time GLOF Early Warning Systems.
- Strengthen satellite and field-based monitoring.
- Conduct periodic hazard assessments.
- Improve NDMA–State coordination.
- Promote climate-resilient infrastructure.
- Enhance local disaster preparedness.
- Expand cryosphere research in the Himalayas.

India's cheapest power is here, the grid must catch up

India is leaving tens of gigawatts (GW) of cheap solar and wind power stranded – not because the projects are not ready, but because the grid is not. Upgrading the existing grid with advanced technologies and adding storage at key nodes can unlock 1,000 GW of new clean energy, without acquiring any additional land for transmission.

India is on the verge of a major shift in its electricity system. Solar and wind are now the country's cheapest power sources, and deployment is accelerating, with over 45 GW added in 2025, roughly matching the United States. Paired with some of the world's lowest battery costs, India can now deliver firm clean power at about ₹3.5 per kWh.

Yet, just as technology and prices have aligned, transmission has become the defining constraint. More than 50 GW of renewable energy is already stranded because projects can come online in 12 to 18 months, but transmission takes three to five years to build, slowed by land acquisition, multi-agency approvals, and restrictions on new corridors. Without faster and smarter grid expansion, the benefits of low-cost clean energy will remain out of reach.

India has about 250 GW of renewables today, 100 GW under construction, and will need to add 2,000 GW by 2050 to meet rising demand and electrify industry and transport. This implies one of the largest transmission build-outs anywhere in the world. The question is no longer whether India must build more lines – it must – but whether new lines alone will suffice. They will not. India needs both major new transmission and far better use of the network it already has.

Creating clean-energy superhighways

India can unlock the equivalent of nearly 1,000 GW of renewable energy far faster than building new lines by tapping the vast potential of its existing grid. Much of this potential is hidden in plain sight. Four opportunities stand out.

Storage unlocks more from the same wires. First, most renewable plants today use their transmission connections only about 25% of the time. For example, solar energy fills the transmission line during the day, but the same connection sits idle during evening peaks and at night. It is a bit like a highway used only during rush hour – busy for a few hours, empty the rest of the day. Adding batteries at the same locations allows power to be stored and delivered during evening peaks and at night, raising utilisation two to three times without new corridors or land. This directly enables the equivalent of 400 GW of additional clean energy.

Coal corridors can also carry clean power. Second, power lines connected to coal-based



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power plants offer another major opportunity. Many high-cost or old coal plants, totalling about 100 GW, operate at low output for long periods despite having valuable transmission connections. Locating solar and wind near these stations allows clean power to use this underused capacity whenever coal units are not fully loaded. In many hours it is cheaper to transmit renewable power than to run the coal plants, giving developers access to scarce grid connection and providing coal plant owners new revenue from underutilised assets. This approach can enable the equivalent of 100 GW of additional clean energy.

Using existing substations. A third opportunity sits at existing transmission substations. Many of these locations can take on new grid connections, letting more renewable projects plug straight into the system. Coupling these nodes with batteries can further support peak-demand supply and help manage power flows. Nationally, this could carry around 100 GW of additional clean energy.

Modern wires can carry double the power. And fourth, much of India's grid still uses older wires or conductors that sag under heat and restrict flow. Replacing them with high-temperature, low-sag conductors – manufactured domestically – can nearly double transfer capacity on the same towers and rights-of-way. It is like upgrading the engines on a train so it can haul twice as many goods on the same track – no new land, just better technology. This added headroom allows reconductoring to double the clean energy enabled by storage and shared transmission connections – raising the total potential to over 1,000 GW within the current transmission footprint and effectively transforming today's corridors into clean-energy superhighways.

A rapid path

Crucially, these solutions can be deployed within months, not years. They require no new land for transmission, minimal permitting, and far fewer approvals than building new corridors. They can relieve bottlenecks immediately, connect stranded clean power, and let new renewable projects advance while new lines catch up. They also improve grid utilisation and lower the average cost of using the grid.

New renewable energy projects will still require significant land, but locating them near coal plants, renewable energy hubs, or substations – where some land and grid access already exist – offers a practical, lower-conflict pathway as suitable land becomes increasingly difficult to secure.

India must build new transmission, but it must

build it smart. A new line built with advanced conductors and designed to work with storage can carry four to five times more clean power for only a modest additional cost. And with India planning a 40% expansion of its grid over the next decade, costing well over \$200 billion and ranking among the world's largest buildouts, every kilometre must be future-proofed from the start.

India will need both approaches. Upgrading and optimising the existing grid offers the fastest relief to today's bottlenecks, while smarter, higher-capacity new transmission infrastructure will be essential to support the massive renewable energy expansion required in the coming decades.

The policy shifts that will determine success India already enjoys structural advantages: a unified national grid and a track record of adding transmission capacity faster than many developed countries. In the U.S. and parts of Europe, the inability to connect low-cost renewable energy to the grid has become the most severe bottleneck in the energy transition. As India accelerates renewable deployment, it can avoid this trap through forward-looking policy.

Three shifts matter most. First, India's national electricity regulator has already created enabling rules that require solar plants to make better use of their grid access by pairing with storage. This approach now needs to be implemented and expanded at the State level, with regulators and utilities actively incorporating it into planning and procurement decisions.

Second, regulation and procurement norms should reward the use of advanced transmission technologies that cost slightly more upfront but deliver greater system-wide benefits over their lifetime by expanding capacity without the need for new corridors.

Third, the coordinated development of large renewable energy zones and optimised transmission corridors is essential to overcome site-selection, planning, and timing challenges, and to enable the efficient movement of vast volumes of low-cost clean energy.

These measures will help India sustain its lead in low-cost clean power at a time when industries such as steel, aluminium, cement, data centres and chemicals are increasingly demanding reliable 24x7 electricity at predictable prices. The path ahead is clear: build all the transmission India can – and get far more out of every line. The grid is no longer 'background infrastructure'. It is India's next engine of growth, and a cornerstone of a low-cost, high-productivity future.

2. Use of Coal-Based Transmission Corridors

- Several old coal plants operate at low Plant Load Factors (PLFs).
- Renewable projects can utilize their existing transmission infrastructure.
- Potential: ~100 GW additional renewable capacity.

3. Leveraging Existing Substations

- Existing substations can accommodate additional renewable connections.
- Storage integration can improve grid flexibility.
- Potential: ~100 GW additional renewable capacity.

4. Reconductoring with HTLS Conductors

- High Temperature Low Sag (HTLS) conductors increase transmission capacity on existing towers.
- Can nearly double power transfer capacity.
- Combined potential exceeds 1,000 GW within the existing transmission footprint.

Static Linkages

- Electricity: Concurrent List (Entry 38, List III, Seventh Schedule).
- Article 48A – Protection and improvement of environment.
- Article 51A(g) – Fundamental duty to protect the environment.
- India's target:
 - 500 GW non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030.
 - Net Zero by 2070.
- Green Energy Corridors Project aims to integrate renewable energy into the national grid.
- Battery Energy Storage Systems improve:
 - Grid stability.
 - Peak load management.
 - Renewable integration.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Faster renewable energy integration.
- Reduces renewable energy curtailment.
- No additional transmission land requirement.
- Enhances energy security.
- Supports climate commitments.
- Improves efficiency of existing infrastructure.

Challenges

- High initial investment in storage systems.
- Financial stress of DISCOMs.
- Regulatory coordination between Centre and States.
- Need for advanced grid management technologies.
- Just transition concerns in coal-dependent regions.

Way Forward

- Accelerate Battery Energy Storage deployment.
- Expand Green Energy Corridors.
- Promote HTLS conductors and smart-grid technologies.
- Develop Renewable Energy Zones with integrated transmission planning.
- Strengthen Centre-State coordination.
- Future-proof all new transmission projects with advanced technologies.
- Enhance domestic manufacturing of storage and transmission equipment.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India has over 250 GW renewable energy capacity, with about 100 GW under construction.
- More than 50 GW renewable energy projects are stranded due to inadequate transmission infrastructure.
- Renewable projects require 12–18 months for commissioning, whereas transmission lines take 3–5 years.
- India may require nearly 2,000 GW of renewable capacity by 2050 to meet rising electricity demand and decarbonisation goals.
- Experts suggest that upgrading the existing grid can unlock over 1,000 GW of renewable energy without acquiring additional transmission land.

Key Points

Why is Transmission a Bottleneck?

- Solar and wind power have become India's cheapest sources of electricity.
- Transmission infrastructure expansion is delayed due to:
 - Land acquisition issues.
 - Environmental clearances.
 - Multi-agency approvals.
- Grid constraints are slowing renewable energy deployment.

Major Solutions Identified

1. Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)

- Existing renewable transmission assets are utilized only about 25% of the time.
- Storage can shift excess solar power to peak-demand periods.
- Potential: ~400 GW equivalent renewable capacity.

Moving from drone purchases to drone partnerships

The Indian government's planned \$2 billion drone procurement from domestic manufacturers reinforces its commitment to indigenous manufacturing and will boost the country's growing drone industry. It also signals a shift from buying large, sophisticated platforms such as fighter aircraft to smaller, cheaper and more attritable systems. This shift also means procurement practices will have to address the challenges that come with the territory.

Long-term capital procurement that deals with systems such as tanks and fighter jets, is likely to struggle to keep pace with the rapid demand for upgrades and modifications. The willingness to spend money on these platforms is a good sign, but the question now is whether procurement systems will spend it well.

The economics of drones

Although public conversations about military drones typically focus on large uncrewed combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) such as the MQ-9 Reaper and the Bayraktar TB-2, recent conflicts have exemplified the utility of smaller, cheaper drones. These typically fall within the 'micro' and 'nano' drone categories, and are built to be cost-effective. Both Iran's use of drones against the United States and Israel, and the use of drones in the Russia-Ukraine war, have followed this principle. Intercepting drones that are being used to strike high-priced hardware, is typically far more expensive than the drones themselves. The trend across recent wars has been to produce vast numbers of cheap drones, and deploy them in large numbers. Creative uses and modifications of drones that were originally manufactured for commercial use, have also served as an inexpensive means to achieve military objectives.

Ukraine's use of first-person-view (FPV) drones that have been retrofitted with warheads has made many headlines. Innovation in the defence



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drone sector is therefore closely linked to innovation in civilian drone technology, creating a need for more iterative and collaborative research and development (R&D) processes. The case of the Chinese drone industry demonstrates the benefits of closer collaboration among industry, academia and the military.

The challenge of drone relevance

The other unique aspect of procuring tactical drones, is that the challenge lies not in acquiring them, but in ensuring that they stay relevant. A state-of-the-art fighter jet or tank bought in 2015 is still relatively new today, and is reasonably competitive. Tactical drones bought today can be obsolete in as little as two to three years, as enemy capabilities and threat environments continue to evolve. Enemy electronic warfare (EW) units can adapt their jammers to the signal of a new drone in as little as six to eight weeks.

When Ukrainian engineers faced this issue, the solution was not to procure new systems with different communication links, but to replace radio links with fibre-optic cables. Processes need to be quick, and allow for rapid modifications and upgrades without the constraint of red tape and bureaucratic timelines.

Indian procurement frameworks have made some good provisions in this direction, but there is still scope for change. For instance, the draft Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) allows the armed forces to procure commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) systems, enabling them to purchase commercial drones wherever they can be utilised. The DAP also has provisions to streamline upgrades. The Defence Procurement Manual (DPM) allows financial buffers for unforeseen repairs and upgrade costs. These are sensible moves.

The key shortcoming of current procurement frameworks is that buyer-seller relationships

remain fundamentally transactional. The underlying assumption is that once the government identifies a requirement, it can issue a tender and procure a product that meets it. However, in a domain where technology evolves rapidly, products require continuous iteration and improvement.

Partnerships, not transactions

A more suitable model for tactical drone procurement may resemble a managed service contract rather than like purchasing hardware.

Much like large organisations that procure computers with maintenance, software updates and replacement support, the armed forces could enter longer-term agreements with drone manufacturers. Such contracts would provide industry with demand predictability while ensuring assured supply, upgrade pathways and surge production capacity during conflicts. They would also create a framework for continuous improvements, including performance enhancements and adaptations to evolving electronic warfare threats. Most importantly, they would foster closer collaboration between the armed forces and industry in a domain where technology changes rapidly and future requirements are constantly evolving.

While Indian policy frameworks continue to take steps in the right direction, perhaps structural changes within these frameworks could create an environment better suited to keeping pace with the evolution of tactical drones. India's domestic drone industry has the technical foundation to support a more sophisticated procurement relationship. The \$2 billion commitment is the clearest signal yet that the political will exists. Translating that into the right contractual architecture, one that prioritises sustained capability over one-off delivery, is the logical next step.

- Electronic warfare systems can quickly adapt and jam drone communication networks.
- Continuous upgrades are more important than one-time acquisition.

Existing Procurement Provisions

- Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) allows procurement of Commercial-Off-The-Shelf (COTS) systems.
- Defence Procurement Manual (DPM) permits financial provisions for upgrades and maintenance.
- Current framework remains largely transaction-based rather than partnership-based.

Static Linkages

- Self-reliance in defence is essential for strategic autonomy.
- Defence technology is a key component of national security.
- Public procurement should ensure transparency, efficiency, and adaptability.
- Military modernization increasingly depends on emerging technologies such as AI, robotics, and autonomous systems.
- Defence-industrial ecosystems require collaboration among government, industry, and academia.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Reduces defence import dependence.
- Boosts domestic manufacturing and innovation.
- Improves battlefield surveillance and precision strike capability.
- Generates employment and promotes defence startups.
- Enhances strategic autonomy.

Challenges

- Rapid technological obsolescence.
- Dependence on imported electronics and semiconductors.
- Slow procurement procedures.
- Vulnerability to cyber and electronic warfare attacks.
- Limited defence-industry-academia integration.

Way Forward

- Move towards long-term capability partnerships instead of one-time procurement.
- Strengthen DRDO-industry-academia collaboration.
- Expand support through iDEX and Defence Industrial Corridors.
- Develop indigenous semiconductor and sensor ecosystems.
- Establish fast-track procurement mechanisms for emerging technologies.
- Promote AI-enabled and autonomous drone systems.
- Enhance counter-drone and electronic warfare capabilities.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India plans to procure \$2 billion worth of drones from domestic manufacturers, reinforcing Aatmanirbhar Bharat in Defence.
- The move reflects a shift from dependence on expensive conventional platforms (fighter jets, tanks) towards low-cost, attritable, and rapidly deployable drone systems.
- Recent conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine War and West Asia conflicts have demonstrated the growing role of tactical drones in modern warfare.
- The development highlights the need to reform India's defence procurement architecture to accommodate rapidly evolving drone technologies.

Key Points

Strategic Significance

- Promotes indigenous defence manufacturing.
- Strengthens India's defence industrial base.
- Supports the objective of reducing defence import dependence.
- Enhances military preparedness through mass deployment of drones.

Changing Nature of Warfare

- Modern warfare increasingly relies on:
 - Swarm drones
 - FPV (First-Person View) drones
 - Loitering munitions
 - AI-enabled autonomous systems
- Drones create a cost asymmetry, where inexpensive systems can neutralize high-value military assets.

Procurement Challenges

- Traditional procurement models suit long-life platforms such as:
 - Tanks
 - Fighter aircraft
 - Warships
- Tactical drones may become obsolete within 2–3 years.

Defection as merger

The Tenth Schedule is hollowed out by unprincipled politics

There is something deeply troubling about the wave of defections sweeping India's elected representatives. Members of Parliament chief among them. In the latest episode, six Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs are seeking to join the Eknath Shinde faction of the Sena, which emerged after an earlier split in the parent party. This group constitutes exactly two-thirds of the party's Lok Sabha strength, giving them the escape route that their crossover will constitute a merger under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, or the anti-defection law. Under the Tenth Schedule, a member can be disqualified if they voluntarily resign from their party or defy a party whip during a division of votes in the House. In 2003, the law was strengthened by an amendment that removed the earlier "split" provision – which had allowed one-third of a party's members to defect without penalty – and retained only the "merger" exception, under which disqualification does not apply if two-thirds of a party's legislators agree to merge with another party. Engineered splits are now dressed up as mergers, letting groups defect without inviting disqualification. The legal validity of such claims is itself contested, as the Supreme Court of India has, in a past judgment, made clear that a merger cannot be of the legislature party alone, and must involve the parent party as well.

With the Court holding back judgments on several constitutional questions related to this, presiding officers keep waving through such stretched claims – and the practice keeps gathering pace. The Sena splintering follows close on the heels of the TMC rebellion. A rebel group claiming the support of 20 of the TMC's 28 Lok Sabha MPs – led by four-time MP Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar – has aligned itself with the BJP-led NDA, seeking a merger with another party. In April, AAP MPs in the Rajya Sabha had joined the BJP, reducing AAP's Rajya Sabha strength from 10 to three. Now, three TMC members of the Rajya Sabha, Sukhendu Sekhar Ray, Sushmita Dev and Prakash Chik Baraik, have resigned. For all practical purposes, the Tenth Schedule has become redundant and irrelevant, as the Court keeps key decisions pending. The surge in these crossovers, which has the cumulative effect of increasing the strength of the ruling NDA in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, raises questions beyond technicalities. At present, the NDA does not have the two-thirds majority in Parliament needed to pass constitutional amendments. The threshold of two-thirds for constitutional amendments is kept high to ensure a wide political consensus. Bypassing that intent through defections – whatever name they go by – is an affront to representative democracy and the spirit of the Constitution.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Six Shiv Sena (UBT) Lok Sabha MPs have sought to join the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena faction.
- The group constitutes two-thirds of the party's Lok Sabha MPs, enabling it to invoke the merger exception under the Tenth Schedule.
- Similar defections have recently occurred in other political parties, raising concerns about the effectiveness of the Anti-Defection Law.
- The issue has renewed debate on the interpretation of "merger" and the role of constitutional authorities in defection cases.

Key Points

Anti-Defection Law

- Added through the 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985.
- Inserted the Tenth Schedule into the Constitution.
- Objective:
 - Prevent political defections.
 - Ensure stability of elected governments.
 - Promote party discipline.

Grounds for Disqualification

A legislator can be disqualified if:

- Voluntarily gives up membership of a political party.

- Votes or abstains contrary to the party whip without prior permission.

Merger Provision

- No disqualification if:
 - Not less than two-thirds of members of a legislature party agree to merge with another political party.

91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003

- Removed the one-third split provision.
- Retained only the two-thirds merger exception.
- Strengthened anti-defection provisions.

Important Judicial Position

- Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu (1992) Validated the Tenth Schedule.
- Held that Speaker's decisions are subject to judicial review.
- Shrimanth Balasaheb Patil Case (2019) Supreme Court reaffirmed judicial review over Speaker's decisions.

Static Linkages

- Article 102(2) – Disqualification of MPs under Tenth Schedule.
- Article 191(2) – Disqualification of MLAs under Tenth Schedule.
- Article 368 – Constitutional Amendment Procedure.
- Parliamentary democracy operates on:
 - Collective responsibility.
 - Party system.
 - Representative government.
- Constitutional amendments generally require:
 - Special majority in both Houses.
 - State ratification in specified cases.

Critical Analysis

Significance of Anti-Defection Law

- Ensures political stability.
- Prevents horse-trading.
- Protects electoral mandate.
- Strengthens party-based parliamentary democracy.

Issues

- Merger provision often used to legitimize mass defections.
- Delays in adjudication by Speakers.
- Weakens voter trust.
- Encourages opportunistic political realignments.
- Reduces accountability to electorate.

Constitutional Concerns

- Tension between:
 - Representative freedom,
 - Party discipline,
 - Democratic accountability.
- Frequent defections may alter legislative majorities without fresh public mandate.

Way Forward

- Time-bound disposal of defection petitions.
- Independent tribunal for adjudication of defection cases.
- Clear statutory definition of "merger".
- Restrict whip to critical votes only.
- Strengthen judicial oversight.
- Electoral reforms to protect voter mandate.
- Promote constitutional morality in political conduct.

Right of way

India needs to build more footpaths to help pedestrians walk freely

As part of the Supreme Court's expansion of Article 21 since the 1970s, it has declared the right to walk on demarcated footpaths a fundamental right. The Bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and Atul S. Chandurkar reaffirmed the right in a case seeking higher compensation for a five-year-old boy's death after being struck and killed by a tanker lorry in Karnataka. As motorised transport has become more widespread, the Bench noted with regret that walking has become an inconvenience, with motorists often treating pedestrians as a 'nuisance' to be tolerated or cleared. In the absence of a national law governing pedestrian rights, responsibility for pedestrian safety is split across municipal laws, town-planning statutes, and street design guidelines. As such, pedestrians are considered to be safe if they face no immediate physical harm. Most cities also lack continuous unobstructed footpaths; where footpaths do exist, they are often encroached on by parking, vendors, utilities, and construction debris, and competing pressures such as road widening work.

While a right to walk is desirable, the ideas that pavements belong to pedestrians and that they have right of way should be cultural in order to endure. Rights-based legislation in India that has sought to change public culture has had mixed success. The Street Vendors Act 2014 sought to protect vendors from harassment as under Article 19(1)(g). But in most cities, municipalities still conduct "eviction drives" while implementation has lagged because the Act requires surveys, town vending committees, and the demarcation of vending zones – processes that many urban local bodies have delayed or simply abandoned. Weak implementation has allowed informal rent-seeking by officials to persist in some cases. The new judgment is also likely to set up disputes with the 2014 Act. Second, the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act 2003 curtailed public smoking over 20 years, but not by "restitutionary remedies", as the Court has suggested for walking, but with consistent social messaging and small, immediate fines. Finally, despite strict laws and 'Swachh Bharat' mandates, the culture of littering remains because the law focuses on citizens' duty to segregate whereas the state has often overlooked its duty to collect segregated waste. Similarly, if the state does not build footpaths, the citizen's right will be meaningless. The Court's constitutional nudge may thus lead to no real change if it remains a legal tool for compensation after a tragedy. A state using it to 'cleanse' streets of informal commercial activity could also gentrify these public spaces and criminalise the survival of the urban poor. The nudge's principal path to success will be by moving the state's funds towards pedestrian infrastructure.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Supreme Court declared the right to walk safely on demarcated footpaths as a part of Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty).
- Judgment delivered by a Bench of Justice P.S. Narasimha and Justice Atul S. Chandurkar.
- Case concerned the death of a five-year-old child after being hit by a tanker in Karnataka.
- Court emphasized that pedestrian safety is a constitutional obligation of the State.

Key Points

- Article 21 now includes safe pedestrian mobility and access to walkable public spaces.
- Footpaths are essential for:
 - Safety
 - Accessibility
 - Dignity
 - Freedom of movement
- Court observed:
 - Pedestrians are increasingly marginalized due to rapid motorization.
 - Most Indian cities lack continuous and obstruction-free footpaths.
- Need for:
 - Pedestrian-centric urban planning.
 - Dedicated legal framework for pedestrian rights.

- Better municipal accountability.

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to Life and Personal Liberty.
- Article 19(1)(d) – Freedom of movement throughout India.
- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 38 – Promotion of welfare of the people.
- Article 39(e) – Protection against conditions harmful to health.
- Article 47 – Improvement of public health.
- 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992:
 - Urban planning.
 - Roads and bridges.
 - Public amenities.
- Twelfth Schedule – Functions of Municipalities.
- National Urban Transport Policy (2006):
 - "Moving People, Not Vehicles."
- SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Expands the scope of Article 21.
- Promotes inclusive and sustainable urban development.
- Recognizes pedestrians as primary stakeholders in urban transport.
- Supports elderly, children and persons with disabilities.

Challenges

- Absence of a national pedestrian rights law.
- Poor urban infrastructure and encroachments.
- Weak implementation by Urban Local Bodies.
- Potential conflict with livelihood concerns of street vendors.

Constitutional Dimension

- Balancing:
 - Right to Life (Article 21).
 - Right to Livelihood (Article 19(1)(g)).
- Reinforces the concept of a welfare state.

Way Forward

- Enact a comprehensive pedestrian safety law.
- Develop continuous and accessible footpath networks.
- Integrate pedestrian-first principles in city planning.
- Strengthen municipal accountability.
- Ensure coordination between urban planning and street vending policies.
- Increase investment in non-motorized transport infrastructure.

Government that swears by nari shakti keeps failing women



SHAMA MOHAMED

QUALITY WAS one of the basic principles of India's freedom movement. The country's founding fathers strove for equality irrespective of religion, caste, or gender. They ensured that women got equal rights to vote, own property, and participate in public life. Independent India aspired to be a progressive nation that treated its women with dignity, respect, and justice. It is, therefore, disturbing that, as India approaches the 79th year of Independence, women's safety remains in crisis. According to the Women, Peace and Security Index 2023, India ranks 131st out of 177 countries, placing it behind several of its regional peers. For a nation that prides itself on being a global power, this is a sobering reality.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promised to implement the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, which seeks to increase women's representation in legislatures. To fast-track it, the government introduced the 131st Amendment Bill, which couldn't muster the required two-thirds majority. Today, the BJP seems to be using unfair means to break the TMC and the Shiv Sena to get that majority. A question must also be asked of the party whose leader has often used the "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" slogan: What has it done for the security of women on the ground?

The case of Bilkis Bano offers a troubling answer. In August 2022, the 11 men convicted of gang-raping her during the 2002 Gujarat riots were released under a remission policy. Images of the convicts being garlanded upon release by some BJP members shocked the nation. The BJP MP from Dahod, Jashwantsinh Bhabhor, and his brother, the party's MLA from Limkheda, Shaileshbhai Bhabhor, even shared the stage with Shailesh Chimanlal Bhatt, one of the 11 men convicted for gang-raping Bilkis Bano. All this gave the message that even in one of the country's most notorious cases of sexual violence, justice appeared negotiable.

Similarly disturbing is the treatment of self-styled godman Asaram Bapu, who

is serving life sentences in two rape cases. He got parole recently and reportedly visited the Ram Mandir and delivered *satsangs* in Varanasi. What does this say about the government's commitment to women?

Then there is Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, convicted of rape and murder, who has been granted parole on numerous occasions since his conviction in 2017. Parole decisions ultimately require the involvement of state authorities. The frequency with which such relief has been granted has fuelled concerns that political considerations often outweigh sensitivity toward victims and their families.

In 2023, several friends from other countries called me to ask why PM Modi was not listening to India's celebrated women wrestlers, including Olympic medalists, who had accused BJP MP and then Wrestling Federation of India chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh of sexual harassment. Instead of receiving swift justice, the athletes found themselves protesting on the streets of the national capital. The images of the wrestlers being detained by the police while the accused remained politically influential sparked outrage both within India and abroad.

The broader statistics paint an equally troubling picture. Crimes against women remain alarmingly high, with hundreds of thousands of cases registered annually. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, in 2023, 15,000 dowry cases were recorded, with 6,100 deaths—a 14 per cent increase from the previous year. Cases of crimes against women rose from 4.45 lakh in 2022 to 4.48 lakh in 2023.

In which civilised nation is this acceptable? In numerous cases of dowry deaths, domestic violence, sexual assault, and harassment, women continue to face harassment and conviction rates often remain low. It is time for society to show the BJP government the mirror and hold it accountable.

The writer is national spokesperson, Indian National Congress

The broader statistics paint an equally troubling picture. Crimes against women remain alarmingly high, with hundreds of thousands of cases registered annually

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Concerns over women's safety, gender justice, and effectiveness of criminal justice institutions have resurfaced due to debates surrounding remission/parole in high-profile sexual assault cases and allegations involving public figures.
- The issue gains significance in the backdrop of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023, aimed at increasing women's political representation.
- According to the Women, Peace and Security Index 2023, India ranked 131st out of 177 countries.

Key Facts

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 15(1) – Prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex.
- Article 15(3) – State can make special provisions for women and children.
- Article 16 – Equality of opportunity in public employment.
- Article 21 – Right to life and dignity.
- Article 39(a), 39(d) – Adequate livelihood and equal pay for equal work.
- Article 42 – Just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.
- Article 51A(e) – Fundamental duty to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Important Data

- NCRB 2023 Crimes against women: ~4.48 lakh cases.

- Dowry deaths: ~6,100.
- Dowry-related cases: ~15,000.

Women's Reservation

- 106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha.
- 33% reservation in State Legislative Assemblies.
- Applicable after Census and delimitation exercise.

Static Linkages

- Substantive vs Formal Equality.
- Rule of Law.
- Due Process of Law.
- Victim-Centric Justice.
- Gender Justice as a component of Social Justice.
- Reservation in Panchayats and Municipalities under 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments.
- Criminal Law (Amendment) Acts, 2013 and 2018.
- Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.
- Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013.

Issues for Examination

- High incidence of crimes against women.
- Low conviction rates in many offences.
- Delays in investigation and trial.
- Under-reporting due to social stigma.
- Concerns regarding remission/parole in heinous crimes.
- Inadequate victim rehabilitation mechanisms.
- Gender gaps in political representation and decision-making.

Government Initiatives

- Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023.
- Mission Shakti.
- One Stop Centres (Sakhi Centres).
- Women Helpline (181).
- Fast Track Special Courts.
- Nirbhaya Fund.
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao.

Way Forward

- Ensure speedy investigation and trial.
- Strengthen Fast Track Special Courts.
- Improve gender-sensitive policing.
- Enhance victim and witness protection mechanisms.
- Increase women's representation in governance institutions.
- Strengthen implementation of women-centric laws and schemes.
- Promote legal awareness and social behavioural change.

India must not wait for the next Hormuz crisis



ARYA ROY
BARDHAN

IRAN'S CLOSURE of the Strait of Hormuz disrupted a route carrying roughly one-fifth of global oil supplies. Between February 27 and its March 31 peak, Brent crude surged 63.3 per cent. Global natural-gas futures rose as much as 16.7 per cent. India imports more than 88 per cent of its crude oil requirements. After Trump and Iran confirmed the MoU to halt the war on all fronts, Brent prices hit a three-month low.

India's dependence on the strait was uneven yet extensive. Before the war, around 40 per cent of crude imports passed through it. The exposure was greater for gas. India imports approximately 60 per cent of the LPG it consumes, with 90 per cent of those imports travelling through Hormuz. So, over half of domestic consumption was stuck at the chokepoint. Similarly, Hormuz accounted for around 55-60 per cent of India's LNG imports. The blockade created a price shock and a supply shock. India's crude imports fell 13 per cent between February and March, while inventories declined about 15 per cent after the war began. April crude-import volumes were 4.3 per cent lower year-on-year, but the amount paid for them surged 52.3 per cent. This captures the peculiar burden of an oil shock that leads to stagflation. LPG imports fell to nearly half their February level, while domestic LPG production declined around 10 per cent from its March peak. LNG imports contracted 29.6 per cent year-on-year in April. Substitution required longer routes and higher procurement costs.

April wholesale inflation rose to 8.3 per cent, with fuel-and-power inflation reaching 24.7 per cent and crude-petroleum inflation 88.1 per cent. The merchandise trade deficit widened from \$20.7 billion in March to \$28.38 billion in April. Consumer inflation remained relatively contained because retail petrol and diesel prices did not fully reflect the increase in crude costs. This insulation, however, transferred part of the burden from consumers to oil-marketing companies and the government.

The rupee weakened from roughly Rs 91 per dollar just before the war to a record low near Rs 97. Foreign-exchange reserves declined from a record \$728.5 billion on February 27 to \$681.6 billion by June 5, that is, a 6.4 per cent depletion. The crisis confronted the RBI with a policy dilemma. Raising interest rates to contain imported inflation would have weakened domestic demand and jeopardised India's strong growth momentum. Defending the rupee through sustained dollar sales would have depleted foreign-exchange reserves. Yet inaction risked allowing higher energy, freight and input costs to spread across the economy.

A durable reopening of the strait relaxes these constraints. Lower crude prices reduce the import bill and inflationary pressures, support the rupee and give the RBI greater freedom for policy. But depleted inventories, replacement contracts, and delayed inflation pass-through will persist. Broader sourcing from Russia, the Americas and Africa can reduce dependence on any one route. Adopting renewable electricity, storage, electric mobility, and biofuels would reduce the economy's petroleum intensity.

The writer is junior fellow, ORF

The reopening will lower prices and restore supplies, but depleted inventories, replacement contracts, and delayed inflation pass-through will persist

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Iran temporarily closed the Strait of Hormuz amid the West Asia conflict.
- The Strait is a critical global energy chokepoint through which a significant share of world oil and gas trade passes.
- The disruption led to a sharp rise in global crude oil and natural gas prices, exposing India's energy import vulnerability.
- Following a ceasefire understanding, crude prices moderated, easing immediate concerns.

Key Points

India's Dependence on Hormuz

- India imports 88%+ of its crude oil requirement.
- Around 40% of India's crude imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz.
- About 90% of LPG imports and 55-60% of LNG imports transit through Hormuz.

Economic Impact

- Crude oil imports declined due to supply disruption.
- Merchandise trade deficit widened significantly.
- Rupee depreciated against the US Dollar.
- Foreign exchange reserves declined due to intervention and import payments.
- Wholesale inflation increased due to rising fuel prices.

Policy Challenges

- Inflationary pressures from imported energy.
- Exchange-rate volatility.

- Pressure on current account balance.
- Balancing inflation control and economic growth.

Static Linkages

Strait of Hormuz

- Located between Iran (north) and Oman-UAE (south).
- Connects:
 - Persian Gulf
 - Gulf of Oman
 - Arabian Sea

Important Global Maritime Chokepoints

- Strait of Hormuz
- Bab-el-Mandeb Strait
- Strait of Malacca
- Suez Canal
- Panama Canal

Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR)

Indian SPR Locations

- Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh)
- Mangaluru (Karnataka)
- Padur (Karnataka)

Related Concepts

- Energy Security
- Imported Inflation
- Current Account Deficit (CAD)
- Balance of Payments (BoP)
- Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs)

Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Excessive dependence on imported fossil fuels.
- Vulnerability to geopolitical conflicts.
- Risk of imported inflation.
- Pressure on CAD and rupee stability.
- Supply chain disruptions.

Opportunities

- Accelerate renewable energy transition.
- Diversify crude import sources.
- Expand strategic petroleum reserves.
- Strengthen energy diplomacy.

Way Forward

- Diversify oil and gas imports beyond West Asia.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Promote Green Hydrogen Mission.
- Increase renewable energy capacity.
- Strengthen EV ecosystem and biofuel adoption.
- Enhance maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Reduce fossil-fuel dependence through energy transition.

US diktat on AI makes case for global regulation

THE US GOVERNMENT'S directive requiring Anthropic to suspend access for foreign nationals to its AI models, Fable 5 and Mythos 5, has sparked a wider debate over the development and deployment of artificial intelligence and raised concerns across the world. Calls for technological sovereignty are growing louder, with national worries increasing about the implications of a single government being able to restrict access to the most advanced AI systems without consultation or transparency. Equally pressing are concerns about the risks associated with deploying such frontier models in the absence of independent oversight and a robust global governance framework.

The demand for a credible and robust regulatory framework is also gaining momentum, with even industry leaders making the case for stronger oversight. A few days ago, Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei argued that "it is time to go beyond transparency to more serious and binding regulation of AI". While the current issue reportedly stems from concerns about the circumvention of existing safeguards, the manner in which the decision has unfolded raises deeper questions. As Anthropic itself noted, the directive "did not provide specific details of its national security concern". The fundamental question is: Who gets to decide access to frontier AI models? Should such decisions rest with governments, which have previously used chip export controls to restrict access to critical AI hardware, or with executives of private companies, whose decisions may be shaped by commercial and strategic considerations? What is needed is a transparent framework built on clearly defined principles and procedures. In fact, even Amodei has argued that frontier models "should be required to go through technical testing and auditing, and their release should be blocked or reversed as a threat to public safety if they do not meet high standards of safety". He recommended that testing be carried out "by a qualified third party".

Given the transformative and borderless nature of AI, these complex issues cannot be resolved by any one country acting alone. They must be negotiated at the global level through a governance architecture built on broad consensus and inclusive participation. All stakeholders need a seat at the table. India, with one of the world's largest AI user bases and vast amounts of data that contribute to the value and capabilities of global AI systems, is a critical stakeholder in this debate. It must play an active role in shaping the international regulatory framework that will govern AI's future.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The U.S. government reportedly restricted access to advanced AI models (Fable-5 and Mythos-5), citing national security concerns.
- The move has intensified the global debate on:
 - Control over frontier AI technologies.
 - Technological sovereignty.
 - Need for transparent AI governance.
- AI companies, including Anthropic, have advocated mandatory safety testing, independent audits, and regulatory oversight of advanced AI systems.
- The issue highlights the absence of a comprehensive global AI governance framework.

Key Points

Frontier AI Models

- Highly advanced AI systems with capabilities at the cutting edge of current technology.
- Can perform complex reasoning, coding, content generation, scientific research, and autonomous decision-making.

Major Concerns

- National security risks.
- Cyber warfare and autonomous weapons.
- Deepfakes and misinformation.
- Data privacy violations.
- Market concentration among a few technology firms.
- Lack of accountability for AI-generated harms.

Global AI Governance Initiatives

- UN Advisory Body on AI (2023) Recommended inclusive global AI governance.
- G7 Hiroshima AI Process (2023) Framework for trustworthy AI.
- OECD AI Principles (2019) Human-centered and responsible AI development.
- UNESCO Recommendation on AI Ethics (2021) First global standard-setting instrument on AI ethics.

India's AI Initiatives

- India AI Mission (2024) Budget outlay: ₹10,300+ crore.
- Focus on computing infrastructure, datasets, startups, and AI skilling.
- Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 Framework for data protection and privacy.
- National Strategy for AI (NITI Aayog, 2018) "AI for All" approach.

Static Linkages

- Technology as an element of national power.
- Strategic autonomy in critical technologies.
- Principle of accountability in governance.
- International cooperation for global commons issues.
- Balancing innovation with regulation.
- Ethical use of emerging technologies.

Critical Analysis

Advantages of Strong AI Regulation

- Prevents misuse of powerful AI systems.
- Enhances public trust.
- Improves accountability.
- Reduces cybersecurity risks.
- Supports responsible innovation.

Challenges

- Absence of global consensus.
- Regulatory fragmentation across countries.
- Difficulty in assessing AI risks.
- Potential slowdown in innovation.
- Risk of AI monopolization by a few countries or firms.

India's Concerns

- Fair access to AI technologies.
- Avoiding digital colonialism.
- Representation in global AI rule-making.
- Building indigenous AI capabilities.

Way Forward

- Establish a multilateral AI governance framework.
- Mandatory independent safety audits of frontier AI models.
- Develop global AI safety standards.
- Promote transparency in AI deployment.
- Strengthen India's AI ecosystem through India AI Mission.
- Enhance international cooperation through G20, UN, and Global South platforms.
- Balance innovation, security, and ethics.

Delhi's unfinished fight against prejudice

OVER 10 years after the Delhi Police established a specialised cell in an effort to crack down on racially motivated crimes against people from Northeast India, the numbers tell a dismal story. As reported in this newspaper, only 33 cases out of the 2,656 FIRs filed between 2014 and 2026 have resulted in convictions. More than half of those accused have remained "untraced". This glacial progress stands in stark contrast to the continuing experience of discrimination faced by people from the Northeast; earlier this year, two women from Assam reported being assaulted and subjected to racist slurs in Nehru Place, and three women from Arunachal Pradesh complained about racist abuse from neighbours in Malviya Nagar.

The persistence of such complaints, combined with the poor rate of progress on reported crimes, point to serious shortfalls in existing mechanisms. Earlier this year, the Union Home Ministry urged cities across the National Capital Region to appoint nodal officers to address racism faced by people from the Northeast. Delhi already has a nodal officer at the rank of joint commissioner who is responsible for coordinating with its 15 police districts. Gurugram, too, has a helpline that is handled by an officer of the deputy commissioner rank. What is missing is awareness, leading to a culture of impunity and a deepening trust deficit between law enforcement and affected communities.

All too often, as youth from the Northeast, like their counterparts from elsewhere in India, move to different parts of the country for education and jobs, they find their experiences being shaped by slurs and suspicion, housing and employment discrimination, even violence. In 2014, the M.P. Bezbaruah Committee, formed after the killing in Delhi of 19-year-old Nido Taniam from Arunachal Pradesh, warned that only time-bound action against racial crime would keep the prejudice from festering and fuelling the "already strong feeling of alienation" among youth from the Northeast. Yet, it takes a tragedy — like the stabbing of 24-year-old Anjel Chakma from Tripura in Dehradun last year — to acknowledge the cost of ignoring these faultlines. Outrage can serve as a necessary driver of urgency, but it's not a substitute for the granular work of better outreach, sensitisation of police personnel to diversity and greater transparency and accountability.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Delhi Police data (2014–2026):
 - 2,656 FIRs registered involving crimes against people from Northeast India.
 - Only 33 convictions secured.
 - More than half of the accused remained untraced.
- Recent incidents of racial abuse against individuals from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in Delhi revived concerns regarding discrimination and access to justice.
- Issue gained national attention after the death of Nido Taniam (2014), leading to the formation of the M.P. Bezbaruah Committee.

Key Facts for Prelims

M.P. Bezbaruah Committee (2014)

- Constituted by: Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- Trigger: Death of Nido Taniam, a student from Arunachal Pradesh in Delhi.
- Objective:
 - Examine concerns of safety and discrimination faced by people from Northeast India.
- Key Recommendations:
 - Fast-track investigation of racial crimes.
 - Legal safeguards against racial discrimination.
 - Police sensitisation.
 - Awareness campaigns.
 - Dedicated grievance redressal mechanisms.

Institutional Measures

- Special Unit for North Eastern Region (SPUNER) established by Delhi Police.
- Appointment of Nodal Officers for addressing complaints.
- Dedicated helplines for grievance redressal.

Static Linkages

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 14 – Equality before law and equal protection of laws.
- Article 15(1) – Prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
- Article 19(1)(d) & (e) – Freedom of movement and residence throughout India.
- Article 21 – Right to life with dignity.
- Preamble – Justice, Equality and Fraternity.
- Article 51A(e) – Fundamental Duty to promote harmony and common brotherhood transcending regional diversities.

Related Committees/Reports

- M.P. Bezbaruah Committee (2014).
- Second Administrative Reforms Commission (Police Reforms & Citizen-Centric Administration).

Issues for Mains

- Low conviction rate weakens deterrence.
- Under-reporting due to fear and lack of trust.
- Persistence of racial stereotypes.
- Inadequate police sensitisation.
- Weak implementation of committee recommendations.
- Impact on national integration and fraternity.

Way Forward

- Time-bound investigation and prosecution.
- Capacity-building and diversity training for police.
- Strengthening nodal officer mechanisms.
- Awareness campaigns in educational institutions and workplaces.
- Better data collection and transparency.
- Community policing and trust-building initiatives.
- Effective implementation of Bezbaruah Committee recommendations.