DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH

Ammonia leak kills two at T.N. seafood unit

More than 60 people, mostly migrant workers, hospitalised; Chief Minister forms inquiry panel

₹2 lakh *ex-gratia* to be paid to kin of the deceased, both from Odisha; T.N. to arrange return of bodies

Proprietor and manager held; both have pending cases for violations of industrial safety guidelines

R. Srikanth
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CHENNAI

Two migrant workers from Odisha were killed and more than 60 hospitalised after an ammonia gas leak at a shrimp processing unit in Tiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu on Sunday. Of those in hospital, 23 have been admitted to the Intensive Care Unit.

The Tiruvallur district police said the private company, Peter & Paul Seafood Exports Pvt. Ltd., at Kannagipper village near Periyapalayam was engaged in processing shrimps and exporting them.

At the time of the accident, there were 67 people at the site, mostly migrant women, who worked in the factory and lived in the accommodation provided within the premises. The deceased have been identified as Jumani Juang and B. Malothi.

The police arrested the proprietor of the company and the factory manager, who both have a case pending against them for previous violations of industrial safety norms.

During inspection, it was found the company did not have a suitable alarm system, a fire hydrant, or a Form 12 register for the Employee State Insurance scheme.

Safety violations

The company had also not obtained a revised plan approval when new equipment was installed, including an ice flaking machine.

Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay set up a three-member panel to probe into the incident and ordered ₹2 lakh each to be paid to the families of the two dead workers. An official statement said the panel has been tasked to submit an interim report in 24 hours and final report in three days. To prevent the recurrence of such accidents, the government has mandated immediate joint inspections of all hazardous industries, it added.

Mr. Vijay also directed that their bodies be transported to their native places for final rites at the Tamil Nadu government's expense.

The rescue team, comprising 30 personnel, rushed to the location equipped with necessary personal protective equipment, gas detection devices, and CBRN rescue gear.

The team rushed 46 workers to Vels Hospital in Manjakaranai and 21 workers to the Venkateswara Hospital in Red Hills, sources in the district administration said. From there, those in serious condition were rushed to the Rajiv Gandhi Government Hospital, while seven others were sent to the Government Stanley Hospital in Chennai.

The police had earlier indicated that seven workers were feared killed, but the government later clarified that the death toll was actually two.

The Periyapalayam police arrested Mohan, the owner of the factory, and factory manager Daniel, under Section 105 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (punishable culpable homicide not amounting to murder).

Sources in the Department of Industrial Safety and Health said a case had been filed against the company's owner and manager for various violations following inspections.

Even after giving due notice and conducting a second inspection, these violations were not rectified. A chargesheet was then filed against the company's owners and manager, and a case is already pending against them in the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court in Tiruvallur, officials said.

Monitoring lacking

Environment expert K. Karthikeyan recalled a similar ammonia leak that had happened at a seafood unit in Thoothukudi several years ago. As such factories are often located in remote locations, without access to a good emergency response centre, they must have an on-site emergency plan approved by the District Collector, he said.

As in the case of the Manali industrial area, where stacks are monitored by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board, all units using hazardous chemicals should also have a monitoring system whereby the police, fire department, and the respective district administration are alerted in case of a leak for immediate action, he said.

As shrimp spoils quickly, it must be frozen immediately after peeling, and ammonia is the most commonly used refrigerant gas in the industry.

RELATED REPORT ON » PAGE 2

National Disaster Response Force personnel at the seafood unit in Tiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu after the gas leak on Sunday. PTI

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Two migrant workers from Odisha died and more than 60 workers were affected after an ammonia gas leak at a shrimp processing factory in Tiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu.
- Investigation revealed serious violations of industrial safety norms, including absence of alarm systems and failure to rectify previously identified safety deficiencies.
- Tamil Nadu government constituted a three-member inquiry committee and ordered inspections of hazardous industries across the State.
- Factory owner and manager were arrested under provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023.

Key Points

Ammonia (NH_3)

- Colourless gas with a pungent smell.
- Widely used as a refrigerant in:
  - Cold storage units
  - Seafood processing industries
  - Food processing plants
  - Fertilizer manufacturing

Health Effects

- Eye and respiratory irritation.
- Chemical burns.
- Pulmonary edema (fluid accumulation in lungs).
- Fatal at high concentrations.

Industrial Safety Issues Highlighted

- Lack of gas leak detection systems.
- Absence of emergency alarms.
- Non-compliance with inspection directives.
- Inadequate occupational safety measures.
- Vulnerability of migrant workers employed in hazardous industries.

Institutions Involved

- Department of Industrial Safety and Health (DISH).
- Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB).
- Employees' State Insurance (ESI) authorities.
- District Disaster Management Authorities.

Static Linkages

- Article 21: Right to Life includes the right to a safe and healthy working environment.
- Article 42: Provision for just and humane conditions of work.
- Article 39(e): Protection of workers' health and strength.
- Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020.
- Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948.
- Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemicals Rules, 1989.
- Chemical Accidents (Emergency Planning, Preparedness and Response) Rules, 1996.
- Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Guidelines on Chemical Disasters.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Highlights weak enforcement of industrial safety regulations.
- Brings attention to occupational health hazards in export-oriented industries.
- Demonstrates need for stronger compliance monitoring mechanisms.

Challenges

- Shortage of safety audits and inspections.
- Poor implementation of hazardous chemical regulations.
- Limited emergency preparedness in industrial clusters.
- Higher exposure of migrant labourers to unsafe working conditions.
- Weak coordination between industries and local disaster management authorities.

Governance Concerns

- Repeated violations despite prior notices.
- Lack of deterrence against non-compliant industries.
- Need for technology-based monitoring systems.

Way Forward

- Mandatory real-time gas monitoring systems.
- Periodic third-party safety audits.
- Strict implementation of OSHWC Code, 2020.
- Regular mock drills for chemical accidents.
- Integration of hazardous industries with district emergency response systems.
- Safety training for migrant workers in local languages.
- Strengthening chemical disaster management capacities under NDMA guidelines.
- Adoption of digital compliance and inspection mechanisms.

End the free rein of junk food advertising in India

Arun Gupta
Paediatrician, convenor of Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest (NAPI) and co-author of the Lancet Series

Despite the Government of India's plans to amend advertising laws to curb the promotion of HFSS (high in fat, sugar and sodium) foods, such products continue to be advertised rampantly. As evidence of the health harms associated with industrially processed foods engineered to be highly palatable and potentially addictive continues to grow, restricting their advertising – particularly exposure to children and young people – may no longer be avoidable.

Try opening a YouTube video on politics, scrolling through Instagram reels, or scanning a newspaper, and you are likely to encounter advertisements for noodles, chips, biscuits, breakfast cereals, chocolates, sweetened beverages, or other ultra-processed food (UPF) products. Recently, there was a YouTube advertisement for a newly launched baked chips brand in India. The advertisement emphasised the product's cheese and tomato flavours and the "crunchiness" to appeal to consumers. What it did not disclose was that the product is a UPF with ingredients such as maltodextrin, nature-identical flavourings, flavouring substances, salt substitute (KCl,potassium chloride), acidity regulators (627, 631) and emulsifier (322). While prominently promoting selective attributes such as "baked", the advertisement omitted material health information, including the product's high salt and fat content and the presence of refined carbohydrates. Such marketing practices can create a misleading impression of healthfulness while obscuring the nutritional risks associated with these products.

While readers can recall their own experiences, there are a few other examples in the media. A female film celebrity is seen recommending a multigrain, "no maida choco cereal" for her son, despite it being a high-sugar product. An entire family of actors promotes a "12-grain" breakfast cereal, while a popular film actor endorses a biscuit as a "good choice". Most of these products, however, are high in sugar, fat and/or salt, raising questions about the messages conveyed through such endorsements. Such selective disclosures create a false perception of healthfulness and deprives consumers, particularly children and adolescents, of the right to make an informed choice.

Review frameworks

The focus of this article is also to draw the attention of policymakers to the need for reviewing whether existing legal frameworks sufficiently serve the public interest. Clearer legal provisions may be required to effectively regulate the advertising of unhealthy food products.

Advertising is directly linked to increased consumption of UPFs, which is strongly associated with rising rates of obesity and diabetes. These advertisements often feature child actors and use emotionally appealing messages aimed at both children and parents, creating a desire for such products. The fact that in 2024, three major transnational corporations spent $13.2 billion on advertising underscores the volumes and the power of food product advertisements. Advertising does not merely reflect demand; it helps create it. In India alone, more than two lakh junk food advertisements in a month were backed by advertising expenditure of about ₹170 crore.

Evidence suggests that UPFs can encourage overconsumption through mechanisms that resemble those identified in addiction science. The health harms associated with UPFs appear closely linked to their industrial design and marketing strategies. But the food industry fails to disclose this fact to people. Recently, the City of San Francisco filed a lawsuit against 10 major UPF manufacturers, alleging child-targeted marketing, the development of highly compelling product formulations, and inadequate disclosure of health risks such as obesity and diabetes. Among other remedies, the lawsuit sought to prevent further deceptive marketing practices and pushed for corrective measures to address the effects of past false advertising.

A policy gap

The Government of India's National Multisectoral Action Plan (NMAP) for Prevention and Control of Common Non-Communicable Diseases (2017-2022) envisaged the prohibition/restrictions on the advertising of HFSS foods. Many pre-packaged foods are highly processed, containing additives such as colours, flavours, emulsifiers and sweeteners, and are often HFSS. The issue has gained policy attention. In February 2026, the Supreme Court of India, in response to a PIL on warning labels for packaged foods, observed that front-of-pack labelling is necessary to protect the right to health. The Economic Survey 2025-26 also highlighted concerns around unhealthy diets. Several Members of Parliament have called for stronger measures, including front-of-pack warning labels, advertising restrictions and taxation of UPFs. In 2024, the Court had noted that misleading advertisements can encourage the consumption of unhealthy foods by children, pregnant women and the elderly, with potentially serious health consequences. These developments point to a growing recognition that existing safeguards may be inadequate.

The Lancet Series on UPFs and Human Health, published three papers in November 2025 which presented scientific evidence linking UPF consumption to poorer diet quality, displacement of real foods, and a higher risk of obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and other non-communicable diseases. Global and Indian data show that rising UPF consumption has coincided with increasing obesity rates. *The Lancet* made a strong case for policies in the food environments to reduce UPF consumption, with many experts arguing that policymaking should not wait for further evidence.

The food environment needs a fix

Children and adolescents in India are exposed daily to advertisements for UPFs and HFSS foods on television, digital platforms, social media, sports broadcasts and through influencers. This sustained and sophisticated marketing is designed to build brand loyalty and shape lifelong consumption patterns. The aim of the UPF industry is clear: to encourage the displacement of real culinary or cultural foods for profits. What children or youth eat cannot be separated from what they are persuaded to desire at schools, work places, cinema halls, other public places or even at home.

Experts in *The Lancet* Series contend that nutrition education and behaviour-change programmes alone cannot succeed in an environment that is saturated with aggressive marketing of unhealthy food products.

This situation underscores an important constitutional principle: when harm is foreseeable and populations are vulnerable, the state has a duty to protect public health and regulate the marketing of unhealthy food products. India committed in 2017 to restrict such advertising, but that objective remains unfulfilled. Given the scale of the problem, neither market forces nor self-regulation are likely to be sufficient. Therefore, there is a strong case for the Government of India to introduce stricter controls on the advertising and promotion of UPFs and HFSS foods such as planned in 2017 by amending advertisement laws.

If schools are to be protected spaces free from UPFs, HFSS foods and misleading nutrition messages, it is inconsistent to ignore the commercial environment that shapes children's choices outside school. The school environment itself requires clear policy direction, not merely advisories (as Brazil did recently). The Economic Survey has called for stronger regulation of UPF advertising and marketing. International experience, from Chile to Mexico, suggests that voluntary self-regulation is often ineffective, whereas enforceable legal measures can be more effective. Given its influence on children's food choices, advertising warrants stronger regulation as part of the broader right to health.

Restricting the advertising of unhealthy food products need not be viewed as anti-industry or anti-profit. In fact it could reduce company expenditure on advertising and encourage companies to redirect resources towards minimally processed foods and healthier local markets. Such a shift could help shape more sustainable and health-oriented food systems in the future.

Restricting the advertising of ultra-processed food (UPF) products and foods high in fat, sugar and sodium (HFSS) is a public health imperative

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Growing concerns over aggressive advertising of HFSS (High Fat, Sugar and Salt) foods and Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs) despite proposals for stricter regulation.
- Economic Survey 2025-26 highlighted rising consumption of UPFs and associated health risks.
- Supreme Court (2026) emphasized the need for Front-of-Pack Labelling (FOPL) to safeguard public health.
- The Lancet Series on Ultra-Processed Foods and Human Health (2025) linked UPF consumption with obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and other NCDs.
- Government's National Multisectoral Action Plan (NMAP) for Prevention and Control of NCDs (2017-22) envisaged restrictions on HFSS food advertisements.

Key Points

HFSS Foods

- Foods high in:
  - Fat
  - Sugar
  - Salt/Sodium
- Associated with obesity and NCDs.

Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs)

- Industrial formulations containing:
  - Emulsifiers
  - Artificial flavours
  - Preservatives
  - Sweeteners
  - Colours
- Examples:
  - Chips
  - Soft drinks
  - Instant noodles
  - Packaged snacks
  - Breakfast cereals

Major Concerns

- Misleading health claims:
  - "Multigrain"
  - "Baked"
  - "No Maida"
  - "High Fibre"
- Celebrity endorsements influence children and adolescents.
- High consumption linked to:
  - Obesity
  - Type-2 Diabetes
  - Hypertension
  - Cardiovascular Diseases
  - Metabolic Disorders

Policy Developments

- Economic Survey 2025-26 recommended stronger regulation of UPF marketing.
- Supreme Court observations support:
  - Front-of-Pack Warning Labels
  - Consumer's Right to Information
  - Protection of Public Health
- Growing demand for:
  - Warning labels
  - Advertisement restrictions
  - Fiscal measures on unhealthy foods

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to Life includes Right to Health.
- Article 47 – Duty of the State to improve nutrition and public health.
- Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 – Establishes FSSAI.
- Consumer's Right to Information under consumer protection framework.
- Precautionary Principle supports preventive public health regulation.

Critical Analysis

Need for Regulation

- Protects children from targeted marketing.
- Reduces NCD burden.
- Ensures informed consumer choice.
- Strengthens Right to Health.

Challenges

- Strong food industry lobbying.
- Expansion of digital and influencer marketing.
- Weak implementation of advertising norms.
- Absence of mandatory warning labels.

International Experience

- Chile and Mexico have adopted:
  - Warning labels.
  - Restrictions on child-targeted food advertising.
- Evidence suggests mandatory regulation is more effective than voluntary self-regulation.

Way Forward

- Introduce mandatory Front-of-Pack Warning Labels.
- Restrict HFSS/UPF advertisements targeting children.
- Regulate celebrity and influencer endorsements.
- Strengthen FSSAI regulatory framework.
- Promote traditional and minimally processed foods.
- Increase nutrition awareness through schools and public campaigns.
- Develop comprehensive policy for healthy food environments.

Britain after Brexit, divided, uncertain and stagnant

Priyanjali Malik
Writes on security and politics

Some anniversaries are merely observed. Ten years after the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union (EU), on June 23, 2016, and as it prepares for yet another change of Prime Minister, it is clear that whatever the benefits or drawbacks of Britain's divorce from the EU, Brexit has left it bitterly divided. "Take back Control" the Leave campaign had urged. Instead, Britain is floundering in a morass of indecision, low economic growth and a crisis of politics and governability that will likely produce a seventh Prime Minister in the decade since it voted by the narrowest of margins (52 to 48%) to separate itself from its continent and largest trading partner.

An imperial illusion

Brexit was always a trade-off in a quest by some to acquire more control over trade, regulation and immigration, tinged undoubtedly by nostalgia for Britain's imperial past. The idea that Britain could successfully swap access to the €18 trillion European economy for trade deals based on the ties of Empire — and thrive — was always for the birds, but nostalgia is powerful and illogical. Brexit began as a civil war within the Conservative Party amongst those resisting the EU's project of 'ever closer union' and railing against a perceived overbearing and over-reaching Commission that set rules for others to follow. The rules, however, were the conditions under which Britain gained access to the trading partner that, even after Brexit, accounts for 41% of its exports and 50% of its imports.

When David Cameron offered the U.K. an 'in/out referendum' to settle the war within his party, Brexit morphed into a protest vote. It stopped being about Britain's relationship with Europe and transformed into Westminster's relationship with the rest of the country, especially those parts that felt left behind. Brexit unearthed a raft of problems that had little to do with the EU's rules (which London helped shape as a member state), or the free movement of people (a precondition of the single market), even if the 2004 expansion brought a surge of Eastern Europeans settling in Britain for work. Britain's problems were structural. After the 2008 financial crisis, the standard of living for the vast majority stagnated or declined, hit by the years of austerity subsequently imposed on the country to balance its books. While the bankers and banks who precipitated the crisis came through unscathed, life became tougher for ordinary people left to contend with the increasingly underfunded public services they relied on — health care, education and local government.

The resentment this bred provided fertile ground for populism to thrive, and Brexit's focus on immigration provided just that. Immigrants, the siren song went, were taking their jobs, occupying their schools, clogging up their National Health Service (NHS) and pushing them to the margins in their own country: once Britain controlled its borders, life would improve.

Economic reality bites

Things have not improved. While estimates of Brexit's economic costs vary, most economists agree that the loss of unfettered access to Britain's largest trading partner and the end of free movement have acted as a drag on trade and investment, curtailed productivity, and significantly diminished the market for financial and other services. The beneficiaries of Brexit are largely those who facilitate the now voluminous customs paperwork and the additional civil service hires managing Brexit's complexity. And, ironically, those immigrating to Britain are from outside the EU.

For all the rhetoric about controlling immigration, this decade has seen a sharp rise in immigration, largely from outside the EU. Though the number of EU nationals residing in Britain declined gradually from 2016, the number of non-EU immigrants rose sharply from just under 100,000 to peak in 2022-23 at over a million before falling to about 400,000 now. After COVID 19, the NHS, unable to find qualified workers at home, recruited aggressively from abroad. With Europeans feeling unwelcome, doctors and nurses from India, Nigeria, Egypt, Pakistan and the Philippines came instead. Before Brexit, there were 10,000 nurses from India. Today, there are 40,000. Ironically, visibly non-white people were flocking to Britain and the immigration statistics continued to rise while the cost of living was battered by Brexit, COVID-19 and geopolitics.

An uneasy nation

The topic of immigration has become toxic. Hijacked by the far Right, it now represents all the broken promises of the social contract. Because Brexit split the country down the middle into solidifying tribal loyalties of Leavers and Remainers, no matter the unfulfilled promises of leaving, politicians across the spectrum remain afraid of honestly evaluating Brexit. Worse, electorally threatened by the populists (not known for their honesty) mainstream politicians across the political spectrum have focused on the bogeyman of immigration in search of populist votes. A former Home Secretary (of Indian extraction) spoke of the 'invasion of our southern shores' while in office. Out of office, her colleague publicly counted white faces in a Birmingham neighbourhood. And the current Prime Minister voiced concern about Britain becoming an 'island of strangers'. These are not words to unite a multicultural country, forge a middle ground and seek honest answers for Britain's economic problems. Ten years on, Britain is deeply divided about who it is and what it stands for. The centre ground lies vacant as politicians chase populist extremes, making politics a game of survival. The statistics speak for themselves: since Brexit, the U.K. has seen 10 Home Secretaries, nine Foreign Secretaries, eight Chancellors of the Exchequer and six Prime Ministers, with a seventh likely incoming. This is not a country at ease with itself or its place in the world.

Ten years after Brexit, Britain still searches for direction

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- 23 June 2026 marks 10 years of the Brexit Referendum (2016).
- The United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union (EU) by 52%–48%.
- Brexit remains an important case study on:
  - Globalization vs Sovereignty
  - Regional Integration
  - Migration
  - Populism and Democratic Politics
- The U.K. continues to face debates over the economic and political consequences of Brexit.

Key Points

Brexit Timeline

- Referendum: 23 June 2016
- Article 50 invoked: March 2017
- Formal exit from EU: 31 January 2020
- End of transition period: 31 December 2020

Why Brexit Happened?

- Demand for greater national sovereignty.
- Opposition to free movement of people within the EU.
- Concerns over immigration.
- Rise of nationalism and populism.
- Perception of excessive influence of EU institutions on domestic policies.

Major Impacts

Economy

- Increased customs and regulatory checks.
- Trade frictions with the EU.
- Reduced investment and productivity growth.
- Financial services sector lost some access to EU markets.

Migration

- Immigration from EU countries declined.
- Immigration from non-EU countries increased.
- Labour shortages emerged in:
  - Healthcare
  - Agriculture
  - Hospitality
  - Transport

Politics

- Increased political polarization.
- Rise of right-wing populist politics.
- Frequent leadership changes and governance challenges.

Static Linkages

- European Union (EU) established through the Maastricht Treaty (1993).
- EU is a unique supranational organization combining:
  - Economic integration
  - Political cooperation
- Single Market ensures:
  - Free movement of Goods
  - Services
  - Capital
  - Persons
  - Schengen Area ≠ European UnionNot all EU members are in Schengen.
  - Some non-EU countries are part of Schengen.
  - Eurozone ≠ European UnionNot all EU members use the Euro currency.
- Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union provides the legal mechanism for withdrawal from the EU.

Critical Analysis

Positives Claimed by Brexit Supporters

- Greater legislative sovereignty.
- Independent trade policy.
- Control over immigration policies.
- Regulatory autonomy.

Challenges Observed

- Trade barriers with the largest market.
- Reduced labour mobility.
- Economic growth slowdown.
- Increased political fragmentation.
- Continued dependence on migrant labour.

Key Lesson for UPSC

- Economic integration and political sovereignty often involve trade-offs.
- Restricting migration does not necessarily reduce labour demand.
- Populist political narratives may differ from economic outcomes.

Way Forward

- Strengthen mutually beneficial trade partnerships.
- Develop balanced migration policies.
- Enhance labour productivity and skill development.
- Promote evidence-based policymaking.
- Reduce political polarization through inclusive governance.

Changed reality

India must reduce its dependence on the Strait of Hormuz

Nations rise to power on the strength of their economies and, by extension, trade. Historically, countries such as the United Kingdom, Japan, the United States and China have combined economic prosperity with maritime dominance. India's weak shipping sector reflects its geopolitical position. Yet, its seafarers generate billions of dollars in foreign exchange while facing risks from piracy and geopolitical tensions. The recent conflict with Iran showed that control of strategic waterways can be as consequential as economic sanctions. By leveraging the Strait of Hormuz, Iran exposed a critical vulnerability in the global economy. Disruptions to energy flows imposed costs far beyond the battlefield and the economic consequences appear to have played a significant role in shaping the U.S. response. From a shipping perspective and its Hormuz stakes, Iran may have secured strategic gains despite the heavy damage inflicted on it by Israeli and U.S. Even as the attacks on Lebanon cast a shadow over the peace deal, Iran has announced that the Persian Gulf Strait Authority it set up during the war will be the sole authority that will handle Strait of Hormuz transits.

The memorandum of understanding envisages lifting sanctions on Iran and on ships serving Iranian trade. It also mandates Iranian talks with Oman and other Gulf states on maritime administration in the Strait of Hormuz. Previously, vessels transiting the Strait neither paid tolls nor reported to Iran or Oman. Whether or not the new framework results in transit fees is less important than the reality: that shipping companies must now account for Iran as a decisive stakeholder in the Strait of Hormuz. For India, the conflict has exposed a major strategic weakness. Despite the Strait of Hormuz being vital to its energy security, the disruption exposed the absence of a credible contingency plan for such eventualities. India's LPG strategy relies heavily on imports moving through the Strait of Hormuz, supported by a limited fleet of Indian-flagged carriers and a tightly scheduled supply chain with little long-term cavern storage. Similar vulnerabilities affected other fuel supplies too. Many countries are now reassessing their dependence on the Strait of Hormuz. The United Arab Emirates is pursuing a "zero Hormuz dependency" strategy by strengthening alternative infrastructure and routes. India must draw lessons from the crisis. Diversifying supply chains, investing in alternative maritime and land corridors, and strengthening strategic partnerships should become priorities. Projects such as Chabahar offered precisely such an opportunity but India gave up on it. For India, reducing dependence on the Strait of Hormuz is no longer just an economic goal; it is a strategic necessity.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Recent Iran–Israel–U.S. conflict highlighted the strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz.
- Iran demonstrated its ability to influence global energy supplies through its geographical control over the Strait.
- Post-conflict arrangements indicate a greater Iranian role in maritime administration and transit management.
- The crisis exposed India's dependence on the Strait for crude oil, LPG, and other energy imports.

Key Facts

Strait of Hormuz

- Connects:
  - Persian Gulf ⇔ Gulf of Oman ⇔ Arabian Sea
- Located between:
  - Iran (North)
  - Oman & UAE (South)
- One of the world's most important energy chokepoints.
- Significant share of global oil and LNG trade passes through it.

Importance for India

- India imports around 85% of its crude oil requirement.
- West Asia remains India's principal source of crude oil and LPG imports.
- Any disruption can affect:
  - Energy security
  - Inflation
  - Current Account Deficit (CAD)
  - Economic growth

Current Affairs Link

- Iran has sought greater control over maritime transit administration.
- Countries are exploring alternative routes to reduce dependence on Hormuz.
- The crisis renewed focus on:
  - Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR)
  - Alternative energy corridors
  - Maritime security

Static Linkages

- Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) are vital for international trade.
- Maritime chokepoints influence global energy markets.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves help mitigate supply disruptions.
- Energy security is a component of national security.
- Freedom of navigation is a principle under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Critical Analysis

Strategic Concerns

- Overdependence on a single maritime route.
- Vulnerability to geopolitical conflicts in West Asia.
- Limited Indian-flagged shipping capacity.
- Inadequate long-term LPG and crude storage.

Strategic Opportunities

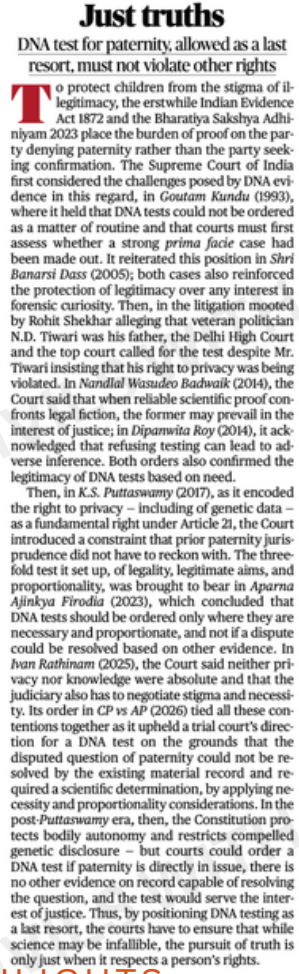
- Diversification of energy import sources.
- Expansion of Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Strengthening maritime diplomacy.
- Development of alternative trade corridors.

Chabahar Significance

- Provides access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- Reduces excessive dependence on Pakistan-based routes.
- Enhances India's connectivity and energy security objectives.

Way Forward

- Diversify crude oil and gas import sources.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserve capacity.
- Accelerate development of Chabahar-linked connectivity projects.
- Promote Indian merchant shipping.
- Strengthen maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Increase investment in renewable energy and green hydrogen.
- Build resilient energy supply chains.



Just truths

DNA test for paternity, allowed as a last resort, must not violate other rights

To protect children from the stigma of illegitimacy, the erstwhile Indian Evidence Act 1872 and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam 2023 place the burden of proof on the party denying paternity rather than the party seeking confirmation. The Supreme Court of India first considered the challenges posed by DNA evidence in this regard, in *Goutam Kundu* (1993), where it held that DNA tests could not be ordered as a matter of routine and that courts must first assess whether a strong *prima facie* case had been made out. It reiterated this position in *Shri Banarsi Dass* (2005); both cases also reinforced the protection of legitimacy over any interest in forensic curiosity. Then, in the litigation mooted by Rohit Shekhar alleging that veteran politician N.D. Tiwari was his father, the Delhi High Court and the top court called for the test despite Mr. Tiwari insisting that his right to privacy was being violated. In *Nandlal Wasudeo Badwaik* (2014), the Court said that when reliable scientific proof confronts legal fiction, the former may prevail in the interest of justice; in *Dipanwita Roy* (2014), it acknowledged that refusing testing can lead to adverse inference. Both orders also confirmed the legitimacy of DNA tests based on need.

Then, in *K.S. Puttaswamy* (2017), as it encoded the right to privacy – including of genetic data – as a fundamental right under Article 21, the Court introduced a constraint that prior paternity jurisprudence did not have to reckon with. The threefold test it set up, of legality, legitimate aims, and proportionality, was brought to bear in *Aparna Ajinkya Firodia* (2023), which concluded that DNA tests should be ordered only where they are necessary and proportionate, and not if a dispute could be resolved based on other evidence. In *Ivan Rathinam* (2025), the Court said neither privacy nor knowledge were absolute and that the judiciary also has to negotiate stigma and necessity. Its order in *CP vs AP* (2026) tied all these contentions together as it upheld a trial court's direction for a DNA test on the grounds that the disputed question of paternity could not be resolved by the existing material record and required a scientific determination, by applying necessity and proportionality considerations. In the post-*Puttaswamy* era, then, the Constitution protects bodily autonomy and restricts compelled genetic disclosure – but courts could order a DNA test if paternity is directly in issue, there is no other evidence on record capable of resolving the question, and the test would serve the interest of justice. Thus, by positioning DNA testing as a last resort, the courts have to ensure that while science may be infallible, the pursuit of truth is only just when it respects a person's rights.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- In CP vs AP (2026), the Supreme Court upheld a trial court order directing a DNA test in a paternity dispute.
- The Court held that DNA testing may be ordered when:
  - Paternity is directly in issue.
  - Existing evidence is insufficient.
  - The test satisfies the principles of necessity and proportionality.
- The judgment harmonizes earlier rulings on legitimacy, privacy, and scientific evidence.

Key Points

Legal Position

- Section 112, Indian Evidence Act, 1872 (continued under Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023):
  - Presumption of legitimacy for a child born during a valid marriage.
  - Burden of proof lies on the person denying paternity.
  - Objective: Protect children from social stigma.

Evolution of Supreme Court Jurisprudence

Judgment	Principle Established
Goutam Kundu (1993)	DNA tests not to be ordered routinely; strong prima facie case required.
Banarsi Dass (2005)	Presumption of legitimacy enjoys strong protection.
Nandlal Wasudeo Badwaik (2014)	Scientific evidence may prevail over legal presumption.
Dipanwita Roy (2014)	Refusal to undergo DNA test may lead to adverse inference.
K.S. Puttaswamy (2017)	Right to Privacy recognized under Article 21.
Aparna Ajinkya Firodia (2023)	DNA test must satisfy necessity and proportionality.
Ivan Rathinam (2025)	Privacy and right to know are not absolute rights.
CP vs AP (2026)	DNA testing permissible as a last resort where no other evidence can resolve the dispute.

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to Life and Personal Liberty.
- Right to Privacy as a Fundamental Right.
- Doctrine of Proportionality.
- Presumption and Rebuttable Presumption in Evidence Law.
- Natural Justice.
- Best Interest of the Child Principle.
- Evidentiary Value of Scientific and Forensic Evidence.

Critical Analysis

Merits

- Promotes scientific determination of facts.
- Ensures justice in maintenance and inheritance disputes.
- Strengthens child's right to identity.
- Prevents misuse of legal presumptions.

Concerns

- Potential infringement of privacy and bodily autonomy.
- Risk of misuse of genetic information.
- Social and psychological consequences for families.
- Lack of comprehensive genetic data protection framework.

Constitutional Balance

- Privacy vs Right to Know.
- Individual Autonomy vs Interest of Justice.
- Legal Presumption vs Scientific Truth.
- Dignity of Child vs Rights of Alleged Parent.

Way Forward

- Retain DNA testing as a judicially supervised last-resort mechanism.
- Establish a comprehensive genetic data protection framework.
- Create safeguards for collection, storage, and destruction of DNA samples.
- Ensure strict application of necessity and proportionality tests.
- Prioritize the best interests and dignity of the child.

Govt prepares to notify Western Ghats eco sensitive areas in at least three states

Nikhil Ghanekar & Amitabh Sinha
New Delhi, June 21

TWELVE YEARS after it issued the first draft notification, the Centre is finally ready to finalise and notify the demarcation of Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA) in the Western Ghats region, at least in the three states in which contentious issues have more or less been resolved, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Over 56,000 square km of land in six states are proposed to be demarcated as ESA, based on the 2013 recommendations of a high-level working group led by former ISRO chairman K Kasturirangan.

The Centre's original draft notification had come in 2014, and has undergone five revisions since then, but disagreements with the state governments on the areas earmarked for declaration as ESAs within their jurisdictions have not been fully resolved. Even now, the states of Kerala and

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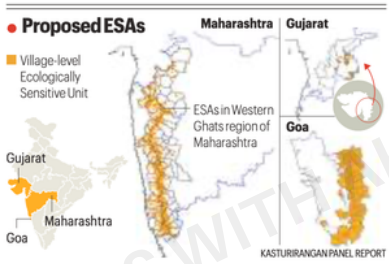

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Union Government is preparing to issue the final notification for Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA) in the Western Ghats based on the Kasturirangan Committee (2013) recommendations.
- Proposed ESA area: 56,825.7 sq km across six States:
  - Gujarat
  - Maharashtra
  - Goa
  - Karnataka
  - Kerala
  - Tamil Nadu
- Consensus largely achieved with Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa; discussions continue with Kerala and Karnataka.
- Notification will be issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Key Points

Kasturirangan Committee (2013)

- High-Level Working Group chaired by Dr. K. Kasturirangan.
- Recommended declaring about 37% of the Western Ghats as ESA.
- Adopted a landscape-level approach using satellite and remote-sensing data.
- Distinguished:
  - Natural landscapes
  - Cultural landscapes (settlements, agriculture, plantations)

Proposed Prohibited Activities in ESA

- New mining and quarrying.
- Thermal power plants.
- Red-category highly polluting industries.
- Large construction projects.

Western Ghats

- Extends from Gujarat to Kerala along the western coast.
- Approximate length: 1,600 km.
- UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- One of the world's 8 hottest biodiversity hotspots.
- Source of major rivers:
  - Godavari
  - Krishna
  - Kaveri
  - Tungabhadra

Static Pointers

- Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 empowers the Centre to notify ecologically sensitive areas.
- India has 4 biodiversity hotspots:
  - Himalaya
  - Indo-Burma
  - Western Ghats-Sri Lanka
  - Sundaland (Nicobar Islands)
- Article 48A: Protection and improvement of environment.
- Article 51A(g): Fundamental duty to protect the natural environment.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens legal protection of a globally important ecosystem.
- Conserves endemic flora and fauna.
- Protects river catchments and water security.
- Supports India's biodiversity conservation commitments.

Concerns

- Livelihood concerns of local communities.
- Restrictions on mining and infrastructure projects.
- Centre-State disagreements on ESA boundaries.
- Balancing conservation with development needs.

Way Forward

- Scientific and transparent ESA demarcation.
- Greater participation of local communities.
- Sustainable livelihood alternatives.
- Strengthened ecological monitoring.
- Cooperative federal approach between Centre and States.

Road to energy security passes through our farms

FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

BY ASHOK GULATI AND SUBHODEEP BASU

THE WEST Asia crisis has exposed a structural vulnerability in India's growth story: Its heavy dependence on imported fossil fuels. Whether it is power generation, transport or fertiliser production, India's energy architecture remains deeply import-dependent. For a fast-growing economy, this is not merely a macroeconomic concern; it is a strategic risk.

But energy insecurity is not India's only challenge. Climate change is increasingly threatening agricultural livelihoods. The forecast of a strong El Niño in 2026 does not augur well for farm incomes. The question, therefore, is not only how India secures its energy future, but also how it builds income resilience for its farmers, who comprise 43 per cent of the workforce. The answer may lie in turning India's *annadata* into *urjadata*, from producers of food to producers of energy, too.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's push towards renewable energy is commendable. As of March 2026, renewable energy capacity stood at about 274 GW, with solar alone crossing 150 GW. But the model so far adopted in solar energy is mainly large solar parks and PM Surya Ghar. The PM-KUSUM scheme is basically for solar pump sets. This is not sufficient for agricultural transformation. We lay out below a case for agriphotovoltaics on farmers' fields that has potential not only to generate clean energy in rural areas but also to halve the government's power subsidy, while also increasing farmers' incomes manifold. If promoted by PM Modi on priority basis, it can transform not just agriculture but the very growth story of India. Let us delve a little deeper into it.

Agriphotovoltaics (Agri-PV) integrate solar power generation and crop cultivation on the same piece of land. This allows farmers to harvest both sunlight and crops. Solar panels are mounted at a height of about 3.5 metres, which permits cultivation beneath them while generating electricity for sale to discoms. The result is dual use of land and dual streams of income.

Unlike agricultural income, which is vulnerable to weather shocks, pest attacks and market fluctuations, solar income is stable. In effect, solar becomes a "third crop" that provides a dependable source of earnings when conventional crops fail.

ICRIER, with support from Kotak Mahindra Bank's CSR initiative, has created a pilot 600 KW solar plant in Rajasthan. The State Bank of India provided a loan of Rs 1.4 crore, and the farmer himself put in Rs 60 lakh. The project has increased the farmer's income from about Rs 40,000 per acre from wheat and bajra cultivation to nearly Rs 4 lakh per acre through a combination of energy sales and shade-tolerant horticulture, demonstrating a tenfold income enhancement potential.

The significance of Agri-PV extends beyond farmers' income. It also addresses a longstanding distortion in India's power sector. Agriculture consumes nearly 2,60,000 GWh of electricity annually, yet pays tariffs far below the actual cost of supply. According to the Comptroller and Auditor General of India's recent report, Steering India's Power Sector Towards Viksit Bharat (2026), the average cost of supplying electricity in India is around Rs 8.5/kWh, and assumed revenue realisation from agricultural consumers close to Re 1/kWh. This implies an effective subsidy of at least roughly Rs 7.5/kWh. India's annual power tariff subsidy bill is approximately Rs 2.35 lakh crore, with agriculture accounting for roughly 85 per cent. The true cost of power subsidy to agriculture may be even higher as the cost of supply to agriculture is higher than Rs 8.5/kWh, once technical losses, long feeder lines and the costs of maintaining rural distribution infrastructure are taken into account. This would take the farm power subsidy to over 90 per cent of total tariff subsidy. No wonder that, despite repeated reforms and financial bailouts, discom finances remain under severe stress.

Agri-PV offers an opportunity to fundamentally alter this equation. By generating electricity at the farm level and feeding it into local distribution networks, it reduces transmission losses and infrastructure costs while transforming farmers from consumers of highly subsidised power into producers of clean energy. However, scaling Agri-PV requires supportive policy. Elevated structures make Agri-PV systems 15-20 per cent more expensive than conventional solar projects, creating a significant entry barrier for farmers.

A differentiated feed-in tariff of say Rs 4.5/kWh, coupled with targeted support under PM-KUSUM, can significantly improve project viability and accelerate adoption. From the perspective of discoms and state governments, such support should be viewed not as an additional subsidy but as a smarter reallocation of existing expenditure. Even at a feed-in tariff of Rs 4.5/kWh, discoms would be procuring clean power at roughly half the effective cost of supplying power to agriculture. In effect, every unit of electricity generated through farmer-owned Agri-PV has the potential to reduce the subsidy burden by nearly half while simultaneously creating a new source of farm income.

The policy implications are clear. Existing support mechanisms under PM-KUSUM Components B and C already provide capital subsidies for standalone solar pumps and the solarisation of grid-connected agricultural pumps. If public support is considered justified for solarising irrigation, a strong case can be made for extending similar support to farmer-owned Agri-PV projects under Component A that simultaneously generate clean energy and preserve farm incomes. Targeted capital subsidies and an attractive feed-in-tariff can be game-changers, and a win-win for the government as well as farmers.

Institutional innovation will be equally important. Just as milk cooperatives transformed India's dairy sector, solar cooperatives can aggregate smallholders, improve access to finance, strengthen bargaining power and manage power sales collectively. Such cooperative institutions can become the vehicle through which the Agri-PV revolution can be unleashed.

If PM Modi takes it up on priority, he can not only transform India but also set an example for the Global South, especially Africa, under the theme of "One Sun, One Earth, and One Grid". That would bring relief from fossil fuels while augmenting farmers' incomes. Can he do that? Only time will tell.

Gulati is distinguished professor and Basu is research fellow at ICRIER. Views are personal

Agriphotovoltaics integrate solar power generation and crop cultivation on the same piece of land. Solar panels are mounted at a height of about 3.5m, which permits cultivation beneath them while generating electricity for sale to discoms

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia have exposed India's vulnerability due to heavy dependence on imported fossil fuels.
- Climate change and the forecast of a strong El Niño (2026) pose risks to agricultural productivity and farm incomes.
- Agriphotovoltaics (Agri-PV) is being proposed as a model to simultaneously address:
  - Energy Security
  - Farmer Income Security
  - Renewable Energy Expansion
  - Power Subsidy Rationalisation

Key Facts

Agriphotovoltaics (Agri-PV)

- Simultaneous cultivation of crops and generation of solar power on the same land.
- Solar panels installed at a height (~3.5 m) allowing cultivation beneath them.
- Farmers earn:
  - Agricultural income
  - Electricity sale income

Renewable Energy Status (March 2026)

- Total Renewable Energy Capacity: ~274 GW
- Solar Energy Capacity: 150+ GW

Rajasthan Agri-PV Pilot

- Implemented by: ICRIER
- Capacity: 600 kW
- Demonstrated nearly 10-fold increase in farm income.

Power Subsidy Scenario

According to CAG Report (2026):

- Average Cost of Supply (ACS): ~₹8.5/kWh
- Agricultural Revenue Realisation: ~₹1/kWh
- Effective Subsidy: ~₹7.5/kWh
- Annual Power Tariff Subsidy: ~₹2.35 lakh crore
- Agriculture accounts for nearly 85–90% of tariff subsidy burden.

Related Scheme

PM-KUSUM Scheme

Components:

- Component A: Decentralized Grid-connected Renewable Energy Plants.
- Component B: Standalone Solar Pumps.
- Component C: Solarisation of Grid-connected Agricultural Pumps.

Static Pointers

- India receives about 300 sunny days annually in most regions.
- Solar energy is a major pillar of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).
- Electricity is a subject in the Concurrent List (List III, Entry 38).
- El Niño is associated with abnormal warming of the central and eastern Pacific Ocean and often affects Indian monsoon rainfall.
- Agriculture employs around 43% of India's workforce.

Significance

For Energy Security

- Reduces dependence on imported fossil fuels.
- Promotes decentralized renewable energy generation.
- Supports India's clean energy transition.

For Farmers

- Diversifies income sources.
- Provides stable income independent of monsoon fluctuations.
- Enhances climate resilience.

For DISCOMs

- Reduces transmission losses.
- Lowers subsidy burden.
- Improves financial sustainability.

Challenges

- High upfront capital cost.
- Elevated solar structures cost 15–20% more than conventional solar projects.
- Financing constraints for small and marginal farmers.
- Need for assured feed-in tariffs.
- Rural grid infrastructure gaps.
- Limited awareness and technical expertise.

Way Forward

- Expand Agri-PV under PM-KUSUM Component A.
- Provide targeted capital subsidies and concessional credit.
- Introduce attractive feed-in tariffs.
- Promote farmer producer organisations (FPOs) and solar cooperatives.
- Strengthen rural grid infrastructure.
- Encourage public-private partnerships for large-scale deployment.

India has spelt red lines to US. Now seal trade deal

THE LAST year-and-a-half has seen strains in the India-US relationship over trade, Russian oil, and claims of American mediation during Operation Sindoor. Despite high-level engagement, including US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's recent visit to India, restoring trust between the two sides remains a work in progress. India is not the only country whose diplomacy has been challenged dealing with the mercurial US President, Donald Trump. Italian PM Giorgia Meloni's once-warm relationship with Trump has soured over Rome's reluctance to support Washington in its war with Tehran. Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Canada's Mark Carney are no strangers to this predicament. Trump's maverick style of statecraft has forced allies and rivals alike to recalibrate their approach to Washington. It is in this context that the meeting between Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi — their first in 16 months, on the sidelines of the G7 summit last week — assumes significance. The Prime Minister welcomed the progress made in peace efforts in West Asia and underlined that "mutual trust is the most important strategic asset today".

The US President, through his military actions, weaponisation of tariffs and transactional diplomacy, has eroded the post-war international order, and India has not been immune to the consequences. The question is whether New Delhi can quickly come to terms with the structural shifts underway in American foreign policy. Given that the US is India's largest economic partner, not just in trade, but also in investment, technology and higher education, the fundamentals of the relationship remain strong. New Delhi has no choice but to adapt and manage Trump for the remaining two-and-a-half years of his term; neither open confrontation nor submissive behaviour is likely to work. Prime Minister Modi's approach at the G7 — crediting Trump for his peace efforts while simultaneously working towards a trade deal to limit tariffs, as US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer visits India this week — appears to be the most effective course available.

That does not mean India should hesitate to defend its interests. PM Modi raised with Trump the safety of Indian seafarers after External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar lodged a protest with Rubio over US attacks in the Gulf that killed three Indian mariners earlier this month. The task of diplomacy is to make India's red lines clear while navigating crises beyond its control. What remains in India's control is strengthening its leverage by modernising the economy, defence capabilities and technology ecosystem. Achieving those goals will require deeper engagement with the West, particularly the US. India's challenge is to preserve both partnership and autonomy.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India–US relations have faced challenges due to evolving US foreign policy under President Donald Trump.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Trump met on the sidelines of the G7 Summit after a gap of 16 months.
- Key issues include:
  - US claims regarding mediation during Operation Sindoor.
  - Tariff-related trade concerns.
  - Developments in West Asia affecting India's interests.
- India reiterated that mutual trust and strategic convergence remain central to the bilateral partnership.

Key Points

- US is India's:
  - Largest trading partner.
  - Major source of FDI, technology and innovation.
  - Important defence and strategic partner.
- Areas of cooperation:
  - Defence (COMCASA, LEMOA, BECA)
  - Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)
  - Indo-Pacific security
  - Semiconductors and AI
  - Clean Energy and Climate Action
- Emerging concerns:
  - Protectionist trade measures and tariffs.
  - Unpredictability in US foreign policy.
  - Geopolitical instability in West Asia affecting energy security and maritime trade.
- India's response:
  - Maintain engagement with the US.
  - Preserve strategic autonomy.
  - Protect national interests without aligning with any bloc.

Static Linkages

- Article 51 directs the State to promote international peace and security.
- Strategic autonomy is a core principle of India's foreign policy.
- India follows a policy of Multi-Alignment, engaging multiple power centres simultaneously.
- Maritime security is critical as over 90% of India's trade by volume is seaborne.
- Energy security remains a key determinant of India's external relations due to dependence on imported crude oil.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Access to advanced technology.
- Strengthening defence preparedness.
- Greater investment and trade opportunities.
- Enhanced role in Indo-Pacific architecture.

Challenges

- Trade disputes and tariff barriers.
- Pressure to align with US geopolitical objectives.
- Vulnerability to disruptions in West Asia.
- Balancing ties with Russia, Europe and Global South.

India's Challenge

- Deepen partnership with the US while safeguarding strategic autonomy.
- Avoid both overdependence and confrontation.

Way Forward

- Strengthen economic and technological capabilities.
- Accelerate defence indigenisation.
- Diversify energy and supply chains.
- Expand engagement through Quad, I2U2 and Indo-Pacific initiatives.
- Institutionalise bilateral cooperation beyond leadership-level diplomacy.
- Continue issue-based partnerships while preserving strategic autonomy.

When doctors can move, healthcare benefits

IN A first-of-its-kind reform, Andhra Pradesh has thrown open its doors to doctors from across India by removing state registration hurdles. An MBBS graduate holding a recognised medical qualification and valid registration with any state or UT medical council in the country will now be allowed to practise in the state, without a separate Andhra Pradesh Medical Council registration or a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the council where they are registered. The order cuts through a bureaucratic roadblock that has long deterred doctors — particularly young graduates and specialists — from moving to states where there are better opportunities. With Andhra Pradesh's registered doctor base standing at roughly 1.05 lakh for a population of nearly 5 crore, and the country's overall doctor-population ratio hovering at 1:811 against the WHO benchmark of 1:1,000, this is likely to help address shortages in specialist care and strengthen the state's ambition to attract medical talent from across India.

The significance of the decision is not limited to healthcare administration alone. In a country that routinely speaks of the ease of living and doing business, domicile preferences in public employment and local registration requirements have often tested the spirit, if not always the letter, of constitutional guarantees. Driven by political and administrative considerations, states frequently create procedural hurdles that limit opportunities. For instance, in an attempt to stem high attrition rates, Bihar recently made it mandatory for government doctors to complete three years of continuous service before becoming eligible for NOCs. There are also other tangible costs for those seeking to relocate. Re-registration fees at state councils typically range from Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000, while obtaining an NOC from a home-state council — a prerequisite for re-registration elsewhere — can take weeks and involve additional paperwork.

Andhra Pradesh's move also aligns with the broader objective behind the National Medical Commission's efforts to create a seamless national registration framework. The "One Nation, One Registration" platform was launched in August 2024 to eliminate impediments to professional mobility. Yet only around 1,800 registration certificates have been issued so far, while more than 30,000 applications remain pending verification at state medical councils. By lowering barriers to mobility, Andhra Pradesh has not only moved to strengthen healthcare delivery, it has shown that states need not wait for administrative bottlenecks to be resolved before adopting the principle underlying the reform.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Andhra Pradesh has allowed doctors registered with any State/UT Medical Council to practice in the state without:
  - Separate Andhra Pradesh Medical Council registration.
  - No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the parent State Medical Council.
- Reform aligns with the National Medical Commission (NMC) initiative of "One Nation, One Registration" (2024).
- Objective: Facilitate interstate mobility of doctors and improve healthcare delivery.

Key Points

- Implementing Authority: Andhra Pradesh Government.
- Beneficiaries:
  - MBBS graduates with recognized qualifications.
  - Specialists seeking interstate practice.
- India's doctor-population ratio: 1:811.
- WHO recommended ratio: 1:1000.
- Andhra Pradesh:
  - Registered doctors: ~1.05 lakh.
  - Population: ~5 crore.
- NMC launched One Nation, One Registration platform in August 2024.
- National Medical Commission Act, 2019 replaced the Medical Council of India (MCI).
- National Medical Register (NMR) serves as the central database of licensed medical practitioners.

Static Linkages

- Article 19(1)(g) – Freedom to practice any profession.
- Article 19(6) – Reasonable restrictions on professional practice.
- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 21 – Right to Health derived from Right to Life.
- Entry 6, State List – Public Health and Sanitation.
- NMC Act, 2019 – Regulation of medical education and profession.
- Cooperative Federalism – Uniform professional standards across states.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Enhances interstate mobility of doctors.
- Reduces bureaucratic barriers.
- Improves availability of specialists.
- Supports creation of a unified national healthcare workforce.
- Advances ease of doing profession.

Concerns

- Need for stronger verification mechanisms.
- Coordination between State Medical Councils remains essential.
- Disciplinary actions and malpractice monitoring require integration.
- Rural-urban imbalance in doctor distribution may continue.

Way Forward

- Operationalize a fully integrated National Medical Register.
- Digitally link all State Medical Councils.
- Create uniform disciplinary and grievance mechanisms.
- Promote specialist deployment in underserved regions.
- Strengthen NMC-led regulatory harmonization across states.