DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH

Meta told to disable 'child sex abuse' content

Instagram asked to provide explanation in seven days; 'action' to be decided after reviewing reply

IT Act, 2000, penalises obscene material; the IT Rules, 2021, enforce obligations on social media

Social media firms in breach may lose exemption under the law for third-party information or data

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has directed Meta, the parent body of several social media platforms, to disable advertisements and content promoting and facilitating access to child sexual exploitative and abuse material (CSEAM) on Instagram, according to government sources.

It has also sought an explanation on the issue.

"The Ministry has ordered Instagram to disable such advertisements. The government has also demanded a detailed explanation on the action taken and other relevant information within seven days. A notice in this regard was issued on Saturday," said a source.

It is learnt that the notice was sent following a directive from IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to senior Ministry officials. Further course of action will be decided after reviewing the reply, said the source.

Policy and standards

The move came a day after the BBC Eye published its investigation revealing that Instagram had allegedly been running "paid adverts promoting child sexual abuse material in India" and that such advertisements linked users to channels on Telegram, where they could buy the material.

Meta's policy on advertisements, meanwhile, stipulate that their content must comply with community standards and must not have imagery depicting nudity and activities that are sexual or sexually suggestive.

In response to a query on the notice, a Meta spokesperson pointed to an earlier statement shared after the BBC report came out, where Meta said it had a "zero tolerance policy for soliciting or sharing CSEAM" and added that while the company deployed technology to detect such advertisements, it was in a "constant battle with criminals who hide among 3.5 billion users and try to evade our detection".

According to Meta's policy, advertisements must "comply with the community standards on adult nudity and sexual activity. Ads must not contain imagery depicting nudity, sexual activity, depictions of people in explicit or sexually suggestive positions, or activities that are sexually suggestive".

Rules and punishments

The policy sets additional restrictions beyond the Community Standard on Adult Nudity and Sexual Activity, says its sub-site.

According to a written reply by Mr. Vaishnaw to the Lok Sabha last year, the IT Act, 2000 provides punishment for publishing or transmitting obscene material and material containing sexually explicit acts in electronic form.

The Act also provides for stringent punishment for publishing or transmitting material depicting children in sexually explicit acts in electronic form.

Besides, the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 enforces obligations on the intermediaries, including social media intermediaries, to observe due diligence.

If they fail to observe it, they lose the exemption under law for third-party information or data or communication links hosted by them. The intermediaries are required to remove any such content within 24 hours.

The Ministry of Home Affairs operates the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal to receive complaints against cybercrimes, with special focus on cybercrimes against children.

It has also set up the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) for such crimes.

The government has, from time to time, blocked websites containing CSAM, based on lists from Interpol received through the Central Bureau of Investigation. It has issued an order to Internet Service Providers (ISPs), directing them to block access to such web pages or websites, said the reply.

Unsafe space

The notice comes amid allegations that Meta's algorithm had been promoting videos with child sexual abuse material on its platforms

The government has demanded a detailed explanation from the corporation on actions taken against the advertisements and other relevant information within seven days

Instagram is alleged to have shown paid advertisements with child sexual abuse material which directed users to Telegram channels where such content was reportedly on sale

Meta's advertisement policy prohibits content with sexually suggestive activities

Meta is in a 'constant battle with criminals who hide among our 3.5 billion users and try to evade detection', a spokesperson said

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) directed Meta to disable advertisements and content facilitating Child Sexual Exploitative and Abuse Material (CSEAM) on Instagram.
- The action followed a BBC Eye investigation, which alleged that Instagram advertisements were redirecting users to Telegram channels selling CSEAM.
- MeitY has sought an explanation from Meta within 7 days and may initiate further action based on its response.

Key Points

- CSEAM (Child Sexual Exploitative and Abuse Material): Any visual, audio, digital or computer-generated material depicting sexual exploitation or abuse of a child.
    - IT Act, 2000Section 67 – Obscene electronic content.
    - Section 67A – Sexually explicit electronic content.
    - Section 67B – Child sexual abuse/exploitative material in electronic form.
    - Section 79 – Conditional Safe Harbour protection for intermediaries.
    - IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021Mandate due diligence by intermediaries.
    - Require removal of unlawful content upon lawful order.
    - Non-compliance may result in loss of Section 79 immunity.
    - POCSO Act, 2012Criminalises sexual offences against children, including use of children for pornographic purposes.
    - Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023Provides additional safeguards for processing children's personal data.
    - National Cyber Crime Reporting PortalOnline platform for reporting cybercrimes, especially against women and children.
    - Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)Nodal agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs for combating cybercrime.
- India blocks CSAM websites based on inputs from Interpol through the CBI.

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to life includes dignity, privacy and protection of children.
- Article 15(3) – Special provisions for children.
- Article 39(e) & 39(f) – Protection of children from abuse and exploitation.
- Article 19(2) – Reasonable restrictions on freedom of speech.
- Section 79, IT Act – Safe Harbour Principle.
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – Protection from sexual exploitation.
- Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.2 – End abuse, exploitation and violence against children.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens digital child protection.
- Reinforces intermediary accountability.
- Promotes responsible AI-enabled content moderation.
- Improves cyber governance.

Challenges

- Encrypted platforms hinder investigation.
- AI moderation may miss evolving CSEAM.
- Cross-border jurisdiction issues.
- Balancing privacy with effective law enforcement.
- Limited cyber forensic capacity.

Way Forward

- Strengthen AI-based proactive detection systems.
- Strict enforcement of IT Rules, 2021.
- Enhance international cooperation through Interpol.
- Improve cyber forensic infrastructure.
- Expand digital literacy and child online safety programmes.
- Faster grievance redressal and reporting mechanisms.
- Regular compliance audits of major intermediaries.

The right to belong beyond official documentation

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On June 24, 2026, a member of India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) released a startling statement. The Indian passport, the person said, is a "travel document" and not a "citizenship document". The assertion set off a minor storm. The reasonable question that followed from many was if the passport would not do it, what document would?

Posed this way, the MEA's statement and the questions it raises become something of a red herring. A passport can only be issued to a non-citizen in exceptional circumstances, where the Government of India is of the opinion that it is necessary to do so in "public interest". Surely, therefore, barring those cases where this power is exercised, a passport must be seen as conclusive proof of a person's citizenship.

No doubt, it might be open for the government to establish under law that a person obtained the document by concealing the true status of his or her citizenship. But that does not mean a passport can be dismissed as merely a travel document.

Citizenship under scrutiny

The MEA's statement takes on an ominous heft when set against the milieu in which it was made. It arrives in the middle of the Election Commission of India (ECI)'s Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in various States. It also comes in the wake of a pair of pronouncements by the Supreme Court of India, most recently on the validity of the SIR in Bihar and the ECI's power to scrutinise citizenship, and, before that, on the Assam Accord, in which the Court had much to say on how it conceives republican ideas of citizenship. Moreover, since an amendment to the Citizenship Act in 2019 (made operational in 2024), rules of naturalisation have been rewritten along religious lines. Taken together, all these developments must prompt us to ask an elementary question: what does it mean to be a citizen of India, who belongs, and on what terms?

The Constitution's answers to these questions, even if some find them indecisive, were reached with some amount of care and caution. Part II to the document, comprising Articles 5 to 11, settled the citizenship of those caught amidst the tragedies of Partition. Article 11 reserved to Parliament a seemingly plenary power to legislate and "make any provision with respect to the acquisition and termination of citizenship and all other matters relating to citizenship".

On a plain and literal reading, it might seem like the Union legislature was accorded unlimited authority to determine what factors can govern citizenship. Indeed, much of the contemporary defence of religiously founded citizenship laws has rested on such an interpretation. But a careful construal of the Constituent Assembly debates, as Gautam Bhatia has shown, suggests that the framers did not treat citizenship as a matter on which Parliament could do as it pleased.

The foundations of citizenship

Consider, for example, an amendment moved to the draft provisions of the Constitution by P.S. Deshmukh. He sought to include an express stipulation "that every person who is a Hindu or a Sikh by religion and is not a citizen of any other State, wherever he resides shall be entitled to be a citizen of India". The effort was met with sharp resistance. Among those opposing the move was Jawaharlal Nehru, who rejected the amendment outright, finding it "absurd on the face of it".

Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar provided the most forthright response to it. He argued that India was plighted to the principles of a secular state. Therefore, there was simply no question of making a distinction between one kind of person and another on any "racial or religious" ground. Ultimately, Deshmukh's proposal was defeated, and B.R. Ambedkar's neutral citizenship clause was affirmed.

Thus, freestanding as the words in Article 11 might be, they must be understood in the context of their wider framing. They have in them an implied limitation drawn from the Constitution's most cherished and foundational commitments to secularism, equality, and non-discrimination. Parliament can decide the modalities of citizenship, but it cannot make religion a condition for entry.

At its conception, India adopted the principle of *jus soli*, that is a form of citizenship predicated on residence and birth. The Citizenship Act, 1955, saw the principle as its primary governing creed. But over time, the legislature moved away from the theory. First, in 1985, Section 6A was introduced into the Act to give effect to the Assam Accord, suspending the conferment of citizenship based on the dates on which people of "Indian origin" had come into India. Second, in 2003, the statute was further amended to deny citizenship to persons born in India even when only one of the parents of such person was an "illegal migrant".

In upholding Section 6A, the Supreme Court in October 2024, appeared to fortify two principles. It effectively saw no implied limitation in Article 11 and instead viewed the grant of power to Parliament to be virtually unlimited. It also appeared to lend constitutional respectability to an idea first promulgated by it in *Sarbananda Sonowal vs Union Of India & Anr.* (2005), that migration into Assam constituted "external aggression" against the State.

This rationale carried into its judgment in *Association for Democratic Reforms vs Union of India*, delivered in May this year, where the Court upheld the SIR exercise in Bihar, holding that the ECI may enquire into a person's citizenship, for the "limited" purpose of deciding eligibility for the electoral roll. The Court described the distinction it drew as "principled", between an adjudication on citizenship and on the administrative satisfaction concerning the continuation of a person's name on the electoral roll. Where the ECI is not satisfied with a person's assertion of citizenship, it ought simply to refer the case to the "competent authority" under the Citizenship Act.

But we have been down this road before. In Assam, during an earlier revision, voters marked "doubtful" were despatched to foreigners' tribunals and consigned to an endless bureaucratic maze to establish their citizenship. Today, therefore, we have ourselves a machinery in which a person need not be declared as a foreigner to be stripped of their basic rights. Instead, they are placed in a vacuum, neither confirmed nor cleared, with their rights being held in indefinite suspension.

Against this backdrop the MEA's clarification appears menacing. Running through all these exercises to establish citizenship is a common thread over the burden of proof. Where a resident could once rely on the state to take their citizenship as given, the onus today has been quietly shifted onto them. Almost any document adduced is seen as inadequate evidence. The Aadhaar card, we are told, is proof only of residence; the voter ID, only of prior registration; and now the passport, only of a right to travel.

The primacy of personhood

Under the Constitution, many of our basic privileges are premised on personhood. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law to "any person", and Article 21 the right to life and personal liberty to all. Citizenship is built on this foundation. It allows one the freedoms guaranteed under Article 19, to speech and expression, to carry on any trade or business, and to assemble peacefully. And it is the status of citizenship that guarantees one the statutory right to vote, to choose one's lawmakers, and to decide how one ought to be governed. Therefore, to be cast out of the position is to forfeit what Hannah Arendt called the right to have rights.

In a constitutional order where personhood comes first, the rules that determine who qualifies as a citizen must rest on more than the accident of paperwork. They must be built on what the Constitution most cherishes, on the equal dignity of every person and the right of each to equal protection of the law.

Paperwork cannot outweigh personhood in a constitutional democracy's citizenship framework

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) recently clarified that an Indian passport is primarily a travel document and not a citizenship document.
- The statement has attracted attention amid the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls undertaken by the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- The issue assumes significance in the backdrop of:
  - Implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) Rules, 2024.
  - Recent Supreme Court judgments concerning citizenship verification and electoral roll revision.
- The debate highlights the distinction between proof of citizenship and documents issued for administrative purposes.

Key Points

Constitutional Framework

- Articles 5–11 (Part II) deal with citizenship at the commencement of the Constitution.
- Article 11 empowers Parliament to regulate acquisition and termination of citizenship.

Citizenship Act, 1955

Provides citizenship by:

- Birth
- Descent
- Registration
- Naturalisation
- Incorporation of territory

Major Amendments

- 1985: Section 6A inserted to implement the Assam Accord.
- 2003: Citizenship by birth restricted where one parent is an illegal migrant.
- 2019: Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) enacted.
- 2024: CAA Rules notified.

Passport

- Governed by the Passports Act, 1967.
- Primarily facilitates international travel.
- Normally issued only to Indian citizens, except in limited statutory exceptions.

Election Commission

- Electoral rolls are prepared under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
- Citizenship is a prerequisite for voter registration under Article 326.

Static Linkages

- Articles 5–11
- Article 14 – Equality before law (available to all persons)
- Article 19 – Rights available only to citizens
- Article 21 – Protection of life and personal liberty
- Article 326 – Elections based on adult suffrage
- Citizenship Act, 1955
- Passports Act, 1967
- Representation of the People Act, 1950
- Assam Accord, 1985
- Concepts:
  - Jus Soli
  - Jus Sanguinis

Why This Issue Matters

- Difference between citizenship and identity documents.
- Constitutional provisions relating to citizenship.
- Powers of Parliament under Article 11.
- Citizenship by birth, descent, registration and naturalisation.
- Link between citizenship and electoral rights.
- Frequently asked areas in Polity Prelims.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Ensures integrity of electoral rolls.
- Strengthens national security and identity verification.
- Clarifies legal status of different government-issued documents.

Concerns

- No single statutory document is declared as conclusive proof of citizenship.
- Administrative verification may create difficulties for vulnerable sections.
- Possibility of exclusion due to documentary deficiencies.
- Need to balance national security with constitutional safeguards.

Way Forward

- Clearly define acceptable documents for citizenship verification.
- Ensure transparent, uniform and legally consistent verification procedures.
- Strengthen birth registration and civil registration systems.
- Improve coordination between the ECI, MHA and State authorities.

Hormuz to home, India's resilience in uncertain times

The Strait of Hormuz has long been recognised as one of the world's most critical maritime routes. Nearly a fifth of global oil consumption passes through this narrow waterway, making it indispensable to global energy security and international trade. Any disruption here immediately reverberates across shipping, freight, insurance and commodity markets.

As someone closely associated with the shipping industry, I witnessed this uncertainty first-hand. One of our company's vessels was among those caught amid heightened tensions in West Asia. We were confronted with an evolving security situation, uncertainty over navigation, and delays that disrupted commercial operations.

Yet, what stood out during this difficult period was the speed and coordination of the Indian government's response. Through continuous engagement with shipping companies, diplomatic channels, maritime authorities and international partners, Indian authorities ensured the safe movement of Indian-flagged vessels. That timely intervention inspired confidence at a time when uncertainty was at its peak. Equally reassuring was the government's unwavering focus on Indian crew and seafarers, ensuring that they remained protected amid one of the world's most challenging shipping environments.

This experience is just one example of India's growing ability to respond swiftly and decisively to external shocks. Whether during the COVID-19 pandemic, global supply chain disruptions, or recent geopolitical tensions in West Asia, India's institutional response has increasingly been characterised by coordination, agility, and strategic foresight.

Economic stability under pressure

India imports nearly 90% of its crude oil requirements, making it particularly vulnerable to disruptions in energy-producing regions. Rising crude prices, elevated freight costs and shipping delays could easily have translated into widespread inflationary pressures and economic uncertainty. Despite these headwinds, India's macroeconomic fundamentals have remained

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A calibrated approach and coordination marked India's response to global energy shocks

remarkably resilient. Inflation has broadly remained within the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s target band despite global commodity volatility, while India continues to be the fastest-growing major economy, supported by strong domestic demand, public investment and expanding manufacturing.

What deserves particular recognition is the manner in which the government has managed the energy challenge. Unlike in several countries where consumers experienced sharp increases in fuel prices or even supply shortages, India adopted a calibrated approach aimed at protecting households while maintaining macroeconomic stability. The government relied on a combination of supply diversification, diplomatic engagement, inventory management and coordinated action with public sector energy companies to ensure uninterrupted availability of petroleum products. Retail fuel prices have been managed prudently, helping to moderate inflationary pressures.

Energy management strategy

The government's strategy has been built around a whole-of-government approach under the leadership and guidance of the Prime Minister, with Ministries, State governments, municipal authorities, oil marketing companies and industry associations working in close coordination to ensure uninterrupted supplies of oil and gas while minimising disruptions to economic activity. In the case of natural gas, the government encouraged the use of piped natural gas (PNG) wherever existing infrastructure permitted. This flexibility was made possible because of sustained investments over the past decade. India's City Gas Distribution network has expanded from just 55 geographical areas in 2014 to over 300 today.

Similarly, exporters navigating rising freight charges, insurance premiums and shipping delays received targeted support. Measures aimed at strengthening export resilience, including liquidity support, logistics facilitation and simplified customs procedures, helped businesses continue servicing international markets despite disruptions to maritime trade. India's strong merchandise exports growth of 16% during April-May FY27 is a clear reflection of this.

The RBI has also complemented government efforts by maintaining financial stability. Despite elevated global uncertainty, liquidity conditions have remained comfortable, financial markets continued to function smoothly, and the banking system remained well-capitalised. The RBI's steady communication and measures such as forex swap facilities, scheme for raising foreign currency deposits from non-resident Indians as well as rationalisation of taxes on foreign portfolio investors (FPI) have been critical in strengthening India's external sector resilience.

India was among the economies most vulnerable to this crisis, yet its policy response has been among the most effective. Across the world, governments grappled with surging fuel prices, elevated inflation and supply shortages. India's strategic response has ensured preserving macroeconomic stability and maintaining growth momentum.

India's preparedness

No economy today can completely insulate itself from geopolitical uncertainty. Commodity markets react instantly to conflict, shipping disruptions ripple across continents and supply chains remain deeply interconnected. A key learning from the Hormuz episode is that resilience is no longer built through emergency response alone. It is created through years of investment in infrastructure, diversified supply chains, institutional coordination and policy preparedness.

Over the past decade, India has steadily expanded refining capacity, diversified crude sourcing, strengthened strategic petroleum reserves, built gas infrastructure, modernised logistics networks and accelerated the transition toward cleaner energy. These investments become invaluable when external shocks test the economy. As India advances towards its vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047, it is institutional capability that will become an increasingly important competitive advantage.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia revived concerns over possible disruption of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global energy chokepoint.
- The Strait handles around 20% of global oil trade and nearly one-fourth of global LNG trade, making any disruption a major risk to global energy security.
- India, which imports around 85% of its crude oil requirement, activated diplomatic, maritime and energy coordination mechanisms to ensure uninterrupted supplies and protect Indian shipping interests.
- The episode highlighted India's growing focus on energy security, supply-chain resilience and macroeconomic stability.

Key Points

Why is the Strait of Hormuz Important?

- Connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- Major oil-exporting countries using the route:
  - Saudi Arabia, Iraq, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Iran
- One of the world's most important maritime chokepoints.

Significance for India

- Imports nearly 85% of crude oil.
- West Asia is India's major source of crude oil and LNG.
- Any disruption can lead to:
  - Higher crude oil prices
  - Imported inflation
  - Widening Current Account Deficit (CAD)
  - Increased freight and insurance costs
  - Supply-chain disruptions

India's Response

- Diversification of crude oil imports.
- Utilisation of Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR).
- Continuous coordination among:
  - Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas
  - Ministry of External Affairs
  - Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs)
  - Directorate General of Shipping
- Protection of Indian seafarers and merchant vessels.
- Strengthening maritime security and diplomatic engagement.

Economic Significance

- Inflation remained broadly within the RBI's tolerance band (2–6%).
- Stable financial markets through RBI's liquidity and forex management.
- Continued emphasis on:
  - Renewable Energy
  - Natural Gas
  - Green Hydrogen
  - Energy diversification

Static Linkages

- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) are maintained by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL).
- Existing SPR locations:
  - Visakhapatnam
  - Mangaluru
  - Padur
- Phase-II SPR:
  - Chandikhol (Odisha)
  - Padur Expansion
- Petroleum and Natural Gas fall under Entry 53 of the Union List.
- Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) regulates downstream petroleum and natural gas sectors.
- India is an Association country (not a full member) of the International Energy Agency (IEA).
- India aims to increase the share of Natural Gas to 15% in the energy mix.
- National Green Hydrogen Mission (2023) aims to reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Diversified crude import basket.
- Improved Strategic Petroleum Reserve capacity.
- Strong institutional coordination.
- Stable inflation despite global volatility.
- Expansion of gas infrastructure supports energy transition.

Challenges

- High dependence on imported crude oil.
- Limited Strategic Petroleum Reserve capacity relative to demand.
- Vulnerability to geopolitical conflicts.
- Rising shipping and insurance costs.
- Continued fossil fuel dependence.

Way Forward

- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserve capacity.
- Diversify crude oil and LNG import sources.
- Accelerate renewable energy and Green Hydrogen.
- Promote domestic exploration under OALP.
- Strengthen maritime security cooperation.

Two together

India and Japan did well to ring-fence their ties from multilateral accords

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's first official visit to India turned out to be an occasion to signal enhanced bilateral coordination in the face of global uncertainties. Rapid changes in geopolitics and technological advances are forcing all countries into fresh thinking, most consequentially with regard to China. The U.S. appears less enthusiastic about the Quad grouping (with India, Japan and Australia) and is unsure of the nomenclature "Indo-Pacific" in its strategy. Against this backdrop, India and Japan declared a joint intent to continue with an 'updated' Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) posture, ring-fencing bilateral ties from multilateral arrangements. Ms. Takaichi signed at least 16 agreements and documents, including a joint statement on energy resilience to support bilateral cooperation along the 'maritime energy transport value chain'. The commitments to energy cooperation were supported by the awareness that to play lead roles in the FOIP, the two sides should cooperate in the energy domain from South Asia to the Indo-Pacific. This concern was also linked with the problems both sides faced regarding the safety of energy-carrying ships and sailors during the U.S.-Israel war against Iran. The two major Asian economies have a shared interest in ensuring that the nearest energy sources in the Gulf remain accessible. They have agreed to build naval platforms to enhance maritime domain awareness and surveillance.

A joint statement issued during the visit mentioned "serious concerns" about the prevailing situation in the South China and East China Seas, and Japanese officials spoke to the media frankly about the need to address the Taiwan issue peacefully. Though a planned visit to Guwahati was dropped, Ms. Takaichi underscored Japan's attention to the northeastern regions of India by connecting them with "relevant partners and regional organisations" of the Bay of Bengal region. BIMSTEC was mentioned as a partner organisation for Japan. Japan has major investments in Bangladesh and Thailand, and connecting these projects, including the Matarbari port in Cox's Bazar, through an 'industrial value chain' with India's northeast can boost regional prosperity and security. Ms. Takaichi has painted a vast canvas of cooperation stretching from India's neighbourhood to the Pacific Ocean to protect the India-Japan relationship from the uncertainties of the current world order, but both sides have to manage multiple other relations effectively to ensure optimal outcomes. They have to manage their relations with China and the U.S. in such a manner that their strategic interests are protected and conflicts avoided. It can be a path of mutual learning and cooperation for India and Japan as they seek to navigate the global turbulence.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India and Japan reaffirmed their Special Strategic and Global Partnership during the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi.
- Both countries committed to an updated Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision amid changing geopolitical dynamics.
- Agreements were signed on energy security, maritime cooperation, supply chain resilience, and critical technologies.
- The joint statement expressed concern over developments in the South China Sea and East China Sea, while reiterating support for a rules-based international order.

Key Points

- Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP):Japan's strategic vision (2016) for a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific.
- Promotes freedom of navigation, connectivity, rule of law, and economic prosperity.
- India's Indo-Pacific Vision:Based on SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).
- Supports ASEAN Centrality, UNCLOS (1982), and an inclusive Indo-Pacific.
- Major Areas of CooperationMaritime security and Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).
- Energy security and resilient maritime energy transport.
- Defence technology and strategic cooperation.
- Supply chain resilience.
- Critical and emerging technologies.
- Northeast connectivity through BIMSTEC.
- Strategic SignificanceEnsures secure Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).
- Reduces supply-chain vulnerabilities.
- Enhances stability in the Indo-Pacific.
- Strengthens India's Act East Policy.

Static Linkages

- Quad: India, Japan, Australia and the United States; not a military alliance.
- UNCLOS, 1982 governs maritime zones, navigation and dispute settlement.
- SAGAR is India's maritime cooperation vision.
- Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) complements regional maritime cooperation.
- BIMSTEC links South Asia with Southeast Asia through the Bay of Bengal.
- Malacca Strait and Strait of Hormuz are critical maritime chokepoints.
- India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil requirement, highlighting the importance of maritime energy security.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens India's Indo-Pacific strategy.
- Enhances maritime and energy security.
- Improves resilience against geopolitical disruptions.
- Diversifies supply chains.
- Promotes a rules-based maritime order.
- Expands strategic connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region.

Challenges

- Growing strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific.
- China's expanding maritime presence.
- Dependence on Gulf energy imports.
- Balancing relations with the US, China and ASEAN.
- Financing and timely execution of connectivity projects.

Way Forward

- Strengthen India–Japan defence and maritime cooperation.
- Expand Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).
- Promote resilient supply chains and critical technologies.
- Accelerate Northeast–BIMSTEC connectivity projects.
- Enhance clean energy and hydrogen cooperation.
- Uphold UNCLOS and freedom of navigation.
- Deepen cooperation under Quad, IPOI and BIMSTEC.

Old wine, new bottle

EPFO's recent changes signal continuity, not radical reform

The Union Labour and Employment Ministry's notification of fresh rules for the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS), and Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance (EDLI) is a procedural formality following the enforcement of the Code on Social Security, 2020, since November last year. Four months ago, the Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) approved the implementation of social security measures framed as a sequel to the Code that subsumes nine laws, including the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948, and the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952. With around eight crore subscribers, changes to the PF legal framework have wide implications for members and their families. Viewed from this angle, the notification signalled continuity and sought to make the framework align with the Code. Even the feature of PF contributions being made voluntary in excess of the statutory wage ceiling of ₹15,000 is not new. The practice of allowing contributions up to 12% of the basic pay, regardless of the wage ceiling, was the norm till the COVID-19 pandemic hit. It was only then that many establishments, while experiencing the shortage of funds, had begun limiting their contributions to the wage ceiling. However, pensioners and members had hoped that the notification would revise the minimum monthly pension of ₹1,000 and the monthly wage ceiling for contribution to the PF beyond ₹15,000, both of which were determined 12 years ago. But they have been left disappointed. According to the EPFO's 2024-25 annual report, about 36.8 lakh of its 81.5 lakh pensioners receive a monthly pension of ₹1,000 or less.

Yet, the government has taken no decision on either issue despite repeated demands from pensioners and other stakeholders. Even if financial implications are a concern, the government's grant-in-aid for the minimum pension, benefiting about 20.6 lakh pensioners, is only around ₹1,000 crore annually. Of the government's outlay of ₹11,000-odd crore towards the EPS for the current year, most of its provision goes for the component of its contribution at 1.16% of the monthly pay (limited to the wage ceiling of ₹15,000) of EPS members. The government should restore the applicability of the EPS to all workers, regardless of pay. If the government feels that the EPFO is getting overburdened with its work, it can formulate a tailored scheme with the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority. Efforts to expedite and simplify claim settlements should continue. The government must remember that substantive EPFO decisions affect crores of employees.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Union Ministry of Labour & Employment has notified new rules for the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS), and Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance (EDLI) after the implementation of the Code on Social Security, 2020.
- The rules operationalize decisions approved by the Central Board of Trustees (CBT), EPFO.
- The notification does not revise:
  - Minimum EPS pension (₹1,000/month).
  - Statutory wage ceiling (₹15,000/month) for EPF/EPS contributions.
- EPFO Annual Report 2024–25:
  - 8 crore subscribers.
  - 81.5 lakh EPS pensioners.
  - 36.8 lakh pensioners receive ₹1,000 or less as monthly pension.

Key Points

- Code on Social Security, 2020 consolidates 9 Central labour laws.
- EPFO administers:
  - Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) – Retirement savings.
  - Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) – Monthly pension after retirement.
  - Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance (EDLI) – Insurance benefit to nominee on death of member.
- EPF contribution:
  - Employee – 12% of basic wages + DA
  - Employer – 12% (shared between EPF and EPS as per rules).
- Government contributes 1.16% of wages (subject to the statutory wage ceiling) towards EPS.
- Employees can voluntarily contribute above the statutory wage ceiling (Voluntary Provident Fund).

Prelims Enrichment

- EPFO functions under the Ministry of Labour & Employment.
- Central Board of Trustees (CBT) is the apex decision-making body of EPFO.
- EPFO is one of the world's largest social security organizations.
- EPS was launched in 1995, replacing the Family Pension Scheme, 1971.
- EDLI Scheme provides life insurance without any separate premium from employees.
- The Code on Social Security, 2020 is one of the Four Labour Codes.

Static Linkages

- Article 41 – Public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement (Directive Principles).
- Article 43 – Living wage and decent standard of life for workers.
- Labour is in the Concurrent List (Entry 24, List III).
- Social security is a key component of a Welfare State.
- Pension is a major instrument of old-age income security.

Mains Value Addition

Significance

- Strengthens India's social security framework.
- Promotes formalization of employment.
- Enhances retirement and survivor security.
- Aligns labour laws under a unified legal framework.

Concerns

- Minimum pension of ₹1,000 has remained unchanged despite inflation.
- Wage ceiling of ₹15,000 has not been revised for years.
- Pension replacement ratio remains low.
- Limited adequacy of old-age income security.

Challenges

- Low pension adequacy.
- Inflation eroding real pension value.
- Limited social security coverage.
- Financial sustainability of pension funds.
- Delays in claim settlement in some cases.

Way Forward

- Periodically revise the minimum pension based on inflation.
- Rationalize the statutory wage ceiling.
- Expand pension coverage for organized workers.
- Strengthen digital claim settlement.
- Improve actuarial sustainability of pension funds.
- Increase awareness regarding retirement planning and voluntary contributions.

From the Iran conflict, four geopolitical shifts India cannot afford to miss

OVER THE BARREL
BY VIKRAM S MEHTA

THE FOG of conflict in the Middle East has lifted somewhat, and one can now discern the geoeconomic and geopolitical changes it has wrought. Whether these changes dissolve over time and conditions revert to the status quo ante February 28, the day American bombers took out the leadership of Iran, or calcify into an invariant structural shift remains to be seen. Irrespective, petroleum-import-dependent countries like India should factor these changes into their discussions on energy and national security.

In this article, I identify four such changes.

First, diminishing confidence in America as a guarantor of security. Other than the most hardened MAGA acolyte, everyone agrees that America was worsted by Iran in this conflict. It failed to achieve any of its stated objectives (regime change, elimination/dilution of Iran's cache of weapons-grade uranium and degradation of Iran as a regional power) despite, according to its Central Command, American bombers flying 10,000 sorties, hitting 1,30,000 targets inside Iran, destroying 85 per cent of Iran's missile manufacturing capabilities and 70 per cent of its missile launch infrastructure and sinking most of its navy between February 28 and April 8, the date of the first ceasefire.

Moreover, America failed to protect its Gulf allies from Iranian missiles and drones. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait all suffered physical and economic damage during the conflict. These countries had permitted America to establish military bases in their territory in exchange for the assurance of such protection. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio recently toured the region to smooth ruffled feathers, but more than anything he may have said, I suspect it was the words of his predecessor, Henry Kissinger, that resonated with the Middle East leaders: "It may be dangerous to be America's enemy, but to be America's friend is fatal". This dent in confidence opens up space for non-Western countries to deepen their security relationships in the region and, in particular, creates an opportunity for India's defence-related manufacturing and technology companies to explore mutually beneficial opportunities.

Second, the emergence of "choke points" as a lever of power. The Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent of global oil supplies flow, has long been recognised as a potential source of market disruption, but essentially only in analysis. Conventional wisdom has held that Iran does not have the capability to enforce a shipping blockade. Indeed, the one time it sought to do so in 1988, the US 5th Fleet blew up two Iranian frigates, demolished oil platforms and cleared the sub-sea mines within days. Oil tankers were barely impeded. This wisdom has now been upended. Through a combination of missile threats, attacks by small but fast speed boats and adroit social messaging, Iran did halt shipping traffic. The economic and political impact was a sharp rise in oil prices — it peaked at $126 per barrel in April, up from $75 per barrel before the commencement of bombing — imposition of demand-reduction measures across Asia, the drawdown of strategic reserves and a political backlash. One reason President Donald Trump sought peace was concern that the rise in gasoline prices at the US retail forecourt would hurt his party's electoral prospects in the November mid-term elections and render him a lame duck president for the balance of his tenure.

Iran's success in leveraging its geographic position for military advantage has focussed attention on "choke points" as a source of asymmetric technological, competitive and strategic power. The former UK PM, Rishi Sunak, has in an article advised countries/corporates not to seek control over the entirety of an integrated technology value chain but to create a niche position that can give them an "unassailable edge". He cites Arm Holdings, whose chips are in 99 per cent of all smartphones, TSMC, the Taiwanese company that makes 70 per cent of all advanced semiconductor chips, and ASML, the Dutch manufacturer of extreme ultraviolet lithography machines, as successful examples of this approach. He could have added China's dominance of rare earths to this list.

Clearly, not every country/corporate can create such a choke point. Those who cannot must find ways of reducing their vulnerability. The Gulf countries are expanding/building overland pipelines as an alternative export route to the choke point of Hormuz. India can reduce its exposure by expanding the storage capacity for strategic petroleum reserves from the current roughly eight days to at least 30 days, or better still, 60 days.

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Third, OAPEC is now a spent cartel. The UAE has left it; several other countries are reportedly on the verge of leaving, and Iran is at military loggerheads with the Arab members. Had anyone asked experts to forecast the price of oil in the event of closure of the Strait of Hormuz, they would have indicated a range between $150 and $200 per barrel. In fact, other than the one-day peak of $126/bbl, prices ranged in the $90s. The reason for this relatively moderate trajectory was the reduction of imports by China from 11.4 mbd in February to 6.4 mbd in May, the drawdown of strategic reserves by the IEA and increased production from non-OPEC producers. Together, these factors illustrated the cartel's weakening influence.

Finally, the reemergence of Iran as a "responsible" state actor. I am no expert on Iranian politics, but from what I have read, the balance of power in the country is shifting towards leaders who, whilst Islamic, are not radical, nor ideologically driven to defend the principles of the 1979 revolution (notwithstanding the week-long funeral planned for Ayatollah Khamenei). They are technocratic, pragmatic and nationalist. They recognise public discontent cannot be indefinitely contained, and policy focus must now be on economic growth.

India has civilisational connections with Iran. Before the US sanctions, New Delhi received oil supplies from Tehran on superior credit terms. It should support Iran's developmental efforts with technical, manpower and financial assistance. This will not only strengthen ties but also enhance the probability of preferential access to energy.

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The recent Iran–Israel–US conflict has revived concerns over global energy security, maritime chokepoints, and geopolitical realignments.
- Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly 20% of global oil trade passes, caused volatility in crude oil prices.
- As India imports over 85% of its crude oil requirement (MoPNG), the developments have direct implications for India's economy, foreign policy, and national security.

Key Points

Geopolitical Shifts

- Declining credibility of traditional security guarantees in West Asia.
- Growing importance of maritime chokepoints as strategic leverage.
- Weakening influence of traditional oil cartels due to diversified global supply.
- Renewed strategic relevance of Iran in regional connectivity and energy.

Implications for India

- Higher crude prices may increase:
  - Current Account Deficit (CAD)
  - Imported inflation
  - Fiscal burden
- Reinforces the need to:
  - Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR).
  - Diversify crude import sources.
  - Accelerate renewable energy transition.
  - Strengthen maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman.
- Around 20% of global petroleum trade passes through the Strait of Hormuz.
- India maintains Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) to tackle emergency oil supply disruptions.
- India is an Associate Member of the International Energy Agency (IEA).
- IEA benchmark: Emergency oil stocks equivalent to 90 days of net oil imports for member countries.
- Chabahar Port (Iran) enhances India's connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) links India with Central Asia, Russia, and Europe.
- Energy security is a key component of national security and economic stability.

Critical Analysis

Opportunities

- Diversification of India's energy imports.
- Expansion of Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Greater role for India in West Asian diplomacy.
- Strengthening Chabahar Port and INSTC.

Challenges

- Rising crude prices affecting inflation and growth.
- Continued dependence on imported hydrocarbons.
- Vulnerability of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).
- Geopolitical instability in West Asia.

Way Forward

- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserve capacity.
- Diversify oil and gas import sources.
- Accelerate renewable energy and Green Hydrogen Mission.
- Strengthen maritime surveillance and naval preparedness.
- Enhance connectivity through Chabahar Port and INSTC.
- Pursue balanced diplomacy under India's policy of Strategic Autonomy.

El Niño, Iran sharpen food prices challenge

THE SOUTHWEST monsoon was 39.8 per cent below normal in June, with the all-India average rainfall of 99.5 mm the fifth lowest recorded for that month after 2014, 2009, 1926 and 1905. This month, which coincides with the peak plantings of the kharif crop, has been better so far. Not only has the cumulative rainfall deficit for the season (June-September) narrowed to 24.1 per cent as on July 5, the monsoon has advanced to cover roughly 95 per cent of the country's area. That should, in turn, help boost kharif sowing acreages, which were overall 22.7 per cent lower compared to last year's coverage till June 25. The lag was even more for oilseeds (53.3 per cent), pulses (30.5 per cent) and cotton (34.6 per cent). Those gaps can potentially close with the monsoon's revival from June 30.

But the outlook, on the whole, is still not great. The India Meteorological Department has forecast average rainfall over the country for July, too, to "most likely to be below normal". Worse, the dreaded El Niño is in a "moderate" phase now, while predicted to intensify into a "strong" event during the second half of the monsoon season and turn "very strong" over October-January. The impact wouldn't be limited to the monsoon rainfall and the kharif crops grown during this season. Since El Niño is known to suppress rainfall and also raise temperatures, it could result in a relatively short and warm winter, affecting the upcoming rabi season crops like wheat, mustard, *chana*, *masoor* and potato as well. The last "strong" El Niño event of 2023-24 led to annual retail food inflation averaging over 8.5 per cent between July 2023 and December 2024. Without proactive supply-side management, there is every risk of a repeat of that protracted episode of elevated food prices.

India imported a record 16.9 million tonnes (mt) of vegetable oils in 2025-26 and 7.3 mt of pulses the previous fiscal. El Niño — which has overtaken Iran as the No 1 risk factor for the Indian economy today — will make further imports inevitable. While keeping the import window open, the government must ensure minimum support prices for pulses, oilseeds, millets and cotton through payment of the difference over open market rates. It will incentivise farmers to cultivate these crops, instead of water-intensive rice, wheat and sugarcane. The year 2026-27 will also test the flagship crop insurance (PMFBY) and rural employment (VB-G RAM G) schemes. Their implementation on the ground matters as much as the supply-side measures to control food inflation.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- June 2026 witnessed 39.8% below-normal rainfall, making it one of the weakest June monsoons on record.
- By 5 July 2026, the seasonal rainfall deficit narrowed to 24.1%, and the southwest monsoon covered nearly 95% of India.
- Delayed monsoon adversely affected kharif sowing, especially pulses, oilseeds and cotton.
- IMD has forecast below-normal rainfall for July 2026.
- A moderate El Niño is expected to strengthen during the latter half of the monsoon, posing risks to agriculture, food inflation and economic growth.

Key Points

- Southwest Monsoon (June–September) contributes nearly 75% of India's annual rainfall.
- Around 52% of India's Net Sown Area is rainfed.
- Initial decline in Kharif sowing (late June):
  - Oilseeds – 53.3%
  - Pulses – 30.5%
  - Cotton – 34.6%
- Strong El Niño generally causes:
  - Below-normal rainfall
  - Higher temperatures
  - Lower soil moisture
  - Reduced reservoir storage
  - Lower agricultural productivity
- Food Inflation: Strong El Niño (2023–24) contributed to persistent food inflation.
- India remains import-dependent for:
  - Edible oils
  - Pulses
- Key government interventions:
  - Minimum Support Price (MSP)
  - Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)
  - Buffer stocking
  - Timely imports
  - Climate-resilient agriculture

Static Linkages

- El Niño: Periodic warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean; part of ENSO.
- ENSO Neutral, El Niño and La Niña significantly influence the Indian Summer Monsoon.
- Positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) can partly offset El Niño's adverse effect on the Indian monsoon.
- Kharif crops depend mainly on monsoon rainfall, whereas Rabi crops depend on irrigation, residual soil moisture and western disturbances.
- MSP is announced based on recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
- PMFBY provides financial protection against crop losses due to natural calamities, pests and diseases.

Value Addition

- Monsoon Months: June–September
- Normal Rainfall: 96–104% of Long Period Average (LPA)
- Rainfed Agriculture: ~52% of Net Sown Area
- ENSO Monitoring Agency: NOAA (USA) and IMD
- Monsoon Forecasting Agency in India: India Meteorological Department (IMD)

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Revival of monsoon can improve kharif sowing.
- MSP and procurement support farmers' incomes.
- PMFBY reduces production risk.
- Timely imports help contain food inflation.

Challenges

- Strong El Niño may weaken the remaining monsoon.
- Lower rainfall may affect both kharif and rabi crops.
- Rising dependence on edible oil and pulse imports.
- Persistent food inflation impacts vulnerable households.
- Slow PMFBY claim settlement in several States.
- Continued cultivation of water-intensive crops despite climatic stress.

Way Forward

- Promote climate-resilient and drought-tolerant crop varieties.
- Expand cultivation of millets, pulses and oilseeds.
- Improve micro-irrigation and watershed development.
- Strengthen weather-based advisories using IMD forecasts.
- Ensure timely MSP procurement and PMFBY claim settlement.
- Build strategic buffer stocks of essential food commodities.
- Encourage efficient groundwater management and crop diversification.

Bengaluru creche ordeal points to a crisis of care

FOR MOST working parents, leaving a toddler at a daycare is as much an act of necessity as a leap of faith — that the vigilance and kindness of well-meaning strangers will stand in for a parent's own presence for those hours. The alleged abuse of toddlers at an on-campus crèche of global IT firm Capgemini in Bengaluru, where children too young to articulate or comprehend their ordeal were locked in washrooms and washing machines to discipline them, strikes at the heart of that trust. The incident raises disturbing questions about a sector that has come up in response to changing family structures and rising workforce participation of women but still lacks commensurate oversight mechanisms.

Reliable childcare is crucial to women's participation in the labour market. A Dalberg-UNDP study published earlier this year found that India's public childcare system currently meets only around 5 per cent of urban demand, while private alternatives are largely unaffordable for low-income families. An estimated 6-7 million urban women need crèche access, a figure projected to reach 20-23 million by 2047. The *Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017* requires establishments with 50 or more employees to provide crèche facilities, but it covers only a fraction of India's workforce and leaves the unorganised sector entirely out of its ambit. While the female labour force participation rate has risen to 41.7 per cent in 2023-24, it is driven by rural, often unpaid or distress-led self-employment. Urban female participation has stayed stubbornly in the mid-to-high twenties. Each reported case of abuse leads to more women cutting back hours, turning down professional opportunities, or leaving the workforce entirely to take on the onus of care work.

While the investigation in Bengaluru must run its course, justice after the fact cannot substitute prevention. That task begins with recognising childcare as essential social and economic infrastructure rather than a discretionary employment perk. At present, daycare centres are governed by an uneven web of state rules, municipal by-laws and local licensing norms, with little uniformity in standards and even less consistency in enforcement. India needs a national regulatory framework that establishes minimum standards for registration, caregiver training, staff verification, child-to-caregiver ratios, inspections and grievance-redressal mechanisms. Regulation must also be matched by sustained public investment to expand access to quality childcare, ensuring that safety is a right, not a privilege.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Alleged abuse of toddlers at a private crèche in Bengaluru has highlighted gaps in the regulation and monitoring of childcare institutions.
- The incident has revived debate on workplace childcare, child safety, women's labour force participation, and the need for a uniform national regulatory framework.

Key Points

  - Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017Crèche facility mandatory for establishments employing 50 or more employees.
  - 26 weeks paid maternity leave (eligible women).
  - Mother allowed 4 visits/day to the crèche.
  - Female Labour Force Participation (PLFS 2023–24)41.7%, but urban FLFPR remains significantly lower than rural.
  - Dalberg–UNDP (2025)Public childcare meets only ~5% of urban demand.
  - 6–7 million urban women currently need crèche access.
  - Demand may reach 20–23 million by 2047.
- No uniform national law regulates daycare centres.
- Existing regulation varies across States through municipal bye-laws and local licensing.

Static Linkages

- Article 15(3): Special provisions for women and children.
- Article 21: Right to live with dignity.
- Article 39(e) & (f): Protection of workers and children.
- Article 42: Just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.
- Article 45: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).
- Directive Principles of State Policy support welfare measures.
- ICDS (1975) – Anganwadi-based early childhood services.
- POSHAN Abhiyaan – Nutrition and child development.
- NEP 2020 – Universal Early Childhood Care and Education.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Improves women's workforce participation.
- Supports Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD).
- Reduces unpaid care burden.
- Promotes gender equality and inclusive growth.

Challenges

- Weak regulatory oversight.
- No national standards for daycare centres.
- Inadequate caregiver training.
- Poor inspection and grievance mechanisms.
- Limited coverage of the organised sector.
- High cost of quality private childcare.

Constitutional Dimension

- Furthers Articles 15(3), 21, 39, 42 and 45.
- Advances SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth).

Way Forward

- Enact a National Childcare Regulation Framework.
- Mandatory registration and periodic inspections.
- Standardise caregiver qualifications and child-caregiver ratio.
- Mandatory police verification of staff.
- Digital grievance redressal mechanism.
- Expand quality public crèches through Anganwadi strengthening.
- Encourage employer-supported childcare through incentives.