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7 PM COMPILATION

1st and 2nd week March, 2026

Features of 7 PM compilation

- ❖ **Comprehensive coverage of a given current topic**
- ❖ **Provide you all the information you need to frame a good answer**
- ❖ **Critical analysis, comparative analysis, legal/constitutional provisions, current issues and challenges and best practices around the world**
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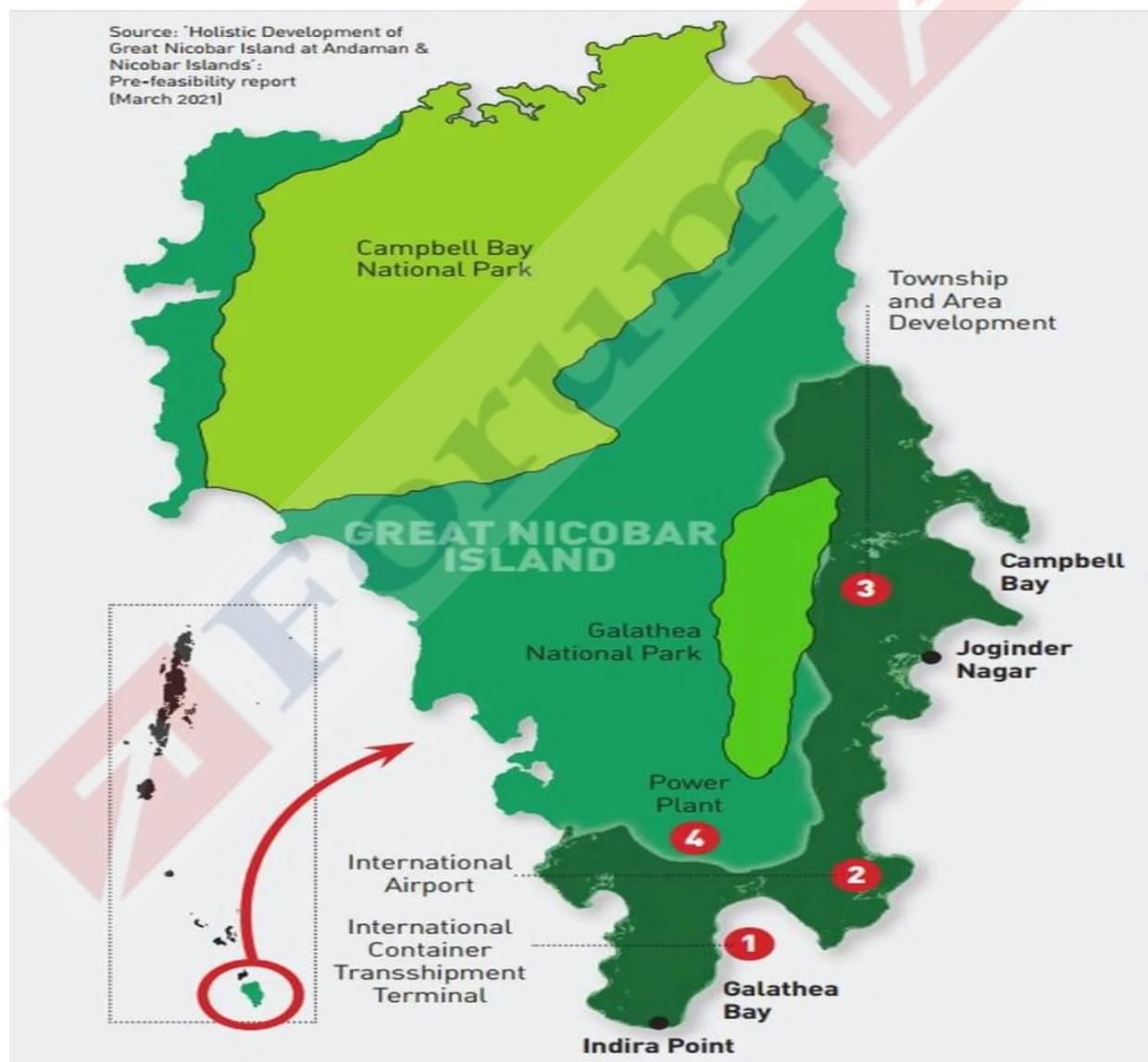- ❖ **Best cost-benefit ratio according to successful aspirants**

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Great Nicobar Island Development Project- Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

The NGT has recently cleared the way for the Great Nicobar Island Development Project – noting its strategic importance & observing that there were 'adequate safeguards' in the project's environmental clearance.

The rapid enhancement of China's navy in Bay of Bengal has greatly increased the strategic importance of the region. It has led to massive infrastructure push by India in the region especially with the launching of Great Nicobar Island Development Project in 2021. However, the region is ecologically sensitive and hence civil society activists wildlife conservationists have alleged that the infrastructure upgrade will harm not only the region's coral reefs & marine ecosystems but as well as the indigenous communities, including the largely uncontacted Shompen tribe.

The Great Nicobar Island Development Project is of critical importance for defence, logistics, commerce & industries, and eco-tourism. Hence, these benefits and the risks associated with the project needs to be comprehensively evaluated.

Source: The Hindu

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What is the Great Nicobar Island Development Project?

- The project involves a comprehensive Rs 72,000-crore infrastructure upgrade on Great Nicobar Island.
- It is being implemented by **Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Ltd (ANIIDCO)**.
- The project covers **166 square km** and aims to leverage the island's strategic location near the Malacca Strait.
- The project will require the diversion of 130 sq.km of forest land & felling of almost a million trees.
- The main goal of the project is to make the island an economic & defence hub.
- The Great Nicobar Island Development project includes development of following:
    1. **International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT)**
    2. **Greenfield international airport**
    3. **Two greenfield cities**
    4. **Coastal mass rapid transport system**
    5. **Free trade zone**
    6. **Gas and Solar-Based Power Plant**
    7. **International cruise terminal (New addition)**
    8. **Ship breaking yard (New addition)**

Geography of the Great Nicobar Island:

- The island of Great Nicobar is the southernmost tip of India and a part of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago that **comprises 600-odd islands**.
- It has an area of 910 sq km with mangroves and Pandan forests along its coast.
- It is **hilly and covered with lush rainforests**. It receives around **3,500 mm of annual rainfall**.
- The rainforests and beaches host numerous **endangered and endemic species** including the **giant leatherback turtle**, **the Nicobar megapode**, **the Great Nicobar crake**, the **Nicobar crab-eating macaque**, and **the Nicobar tree shrew**.

Figure 1 **Source: Wikipedia**

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> Read More- **Importance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands- Explained Pointwise**

What is the significance of Great Nicobar Island Development Project?

1. **Geo-strategic benefit:** Great Nicobar Island is **located close to the Malacca Strait**, which is the main waterway connecting the Indian Ocean to the Pacific & accounts for an estimated 30% of all traded goods globally & a third of the world's maritime oil trade. The Great Nicobar Island Project aims to take **advantage of this strategic position to enhance India's role** in the regional and global maritime economy.

2. **Geo-Security Concerns:** The **Bay of Bengal** and **Indian Ocean region** are vital for India's strategic and security interests, especially with the **Chinese naval expansion**. The project will strengthen India's maritime security and deterrence capabilities.

3. **Upgradation of military infrastructure:** The Great Nicobar project also helps in the upgradation of military infrastructure by the establishment of airfields, jetties, and surveillance facilities. A tri-service A&N Command has been operational at Port Blair since 2001. The INS Baaz Naval Air Station is also located at Campbell Bay.

4. **Economic Boost:** The project includes an International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT), which can make Great Nicobar a significant player in cargo trans-shipment. Transshipment ports area equipped to transfer cargo containers from larger to smaller vessels before they head to their eventual destination. The **ICTT is expected to boost economic activities** in the region. India has only 1 transshipment port at Vizhinjam in Kerala.

5. **Creation of Job opportunities for locals:** The Nicobar plan involves the **creation of infrastructure** (**ports**, **airports** etc.). This will help in creation of job opportunities for the locals.

6. **Tourism Development:** It helps in **creation of tourism prospects in the region**. This will aid the income generation in the region. The percapita income in Andaman & Nicobar Islands for the year 2015-16 was **Rs. 1,24,361**. This was **much lower than the percapita income of other Union Territories** (Chandigarh, Delhi, and Puducherry.)

7. **Social Benefits:** The Project would help in the creation of affordable state-of-the-art facilities for **healthcare**, **quality education**, and **adequate air**, **sea** and **web infrastructure**. It will also facilitate the delivery of e-governance services such as **telemedicine** and **tele-education**, as a part of the Digital India initiative.

What are the associated concerns with the project?

1. **Threat to biodiversity:** Nearly a million trees could be felled as part of the project & nearly **130sq km of pristine forest will be diverted**. This could potentially devastate the island's ecosystem, including **coral reefs**, **the Nicobar Megapode bird**, and **leatherback turtles**. The Nicobar islands are a part of Sundaland Biodiversity Hotspot. The compensatory afforestation is being planned in Haryana. For e.g. the transshipment port will be located at the Galathea Bay – which is an ecologically important area that is home to the nesting sites of Leatherback turtles, and where the Galathea river drains into the sea.

2. **Threat to rights of Indigenous Tribes:** The proposed Nicobar project endangers the rights of the **Shompen** and **Nicobarese tribes**, living on the island. It also violates the letter and spirit of the **Forest Rights Act** (2006), which holds the **Shompen as the sole legally empowered authority** to protect, preserve, regulate and manage the tribal reserve.

3. **Seismic Vulnerability:** The proposed port which is an integral part of this project, is located in a seismically volatile zone, which **experienced permanent subsidence of around 15 feet during**

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the 2004 tsunami. This raises concerns about the safety and viability of constructing such a large-scale infrastructure project in a high-risk, disaster-prone area.

4. **Lack of Adequate Consultation:** The project has been pushed through without adequate deliberations of all the stakeholders like the The Tribal Council. The National Green Tribunal's high-powered committee's report reviewing the environmental clearances has also not been made public.

5. **Undermining international obligations:** The Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary located in the Great Nicobar Island forms part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Hence the preservation of this pristine biodiversity is an international obligation of India. The Galathea Bay WLS & a megapode WLS were de-notified for the project. The Nicobar megapode is a ground-dwelling bird found only on Nicobar islands & the project area will affect its nesting ground.

6. **Lack of adequate Social Impact Assessment:** The Campbell Bay panchayat has raised concerns regarding the lack of adequate social impact assessment before land acquisition. The project will affect the forests & tribal reserves used by the indigenous Shompen & Nicobarese community. Shompen are hunter-gatherers numbering around 250, and are not exposed to regular contact with outside world. Increased contact with outsiders, will increase the risks of Shompen tribe to diseases for which their immunity is not developed.

7. **Economic unviability:** The aspiration to replicate Singapore/Hong Kong duty-free ports/free trade zones on remote Great Nicobar Island (2,000 km from Chennai and Kolkata) without a hinterland, resources or industrial backup makes it economically unviable and unrealistic.

What should be the Way Forward?

We must aim to address the trilemma of infrastructure development, preserving pristine biodiversity respect and being sensitive to the rights of the indigenous inhabitants, and tribals. Following measures should be adopted to address the trilemma:

1. **Due regards to tribal rights:** The development work must be carried out with due regard to tribal rights. This should involve proper adherence to policies like the Shompen Policy of 2015. The Shompen Policy of 2015 calls for giving priority to tribal rights over large scale development proposals.

2. **Separation of security and development capabilities:** The security capabilities of Andaman and Nicobar Island need to be addressed separately. This must have no linkage with the developments contemplated for Great Nicobar Island.

3. **Re-assessment of economic feasibility of the project:** The project lies equidistant (1,300 km) from established trans-shipment hubs and bunkering ports of Singapore, Port Klang (Malaysia) and Hambantota (Sri Lanka). Hence the economic viability of yet another transshipment terminal in Great Nicobar Island needs to be reassessed, especially since India inaugurated its own trans-shipment terminal in Vizhinjam in Kerala.

4. **Proper Social and Environmental Impact Assessment:** Any construction under the Great Nicobar Development plan should involve a proper and detailed Environment Impact Assessment (as mandated by the Environment Protection Act 1986). This will make development more socially and environmentally feasible.

5. **Eco-friendly Construction:** The construction of infrastructure should be done using eco-friendly practices like strict adherence to GRIHA code for building construction.

6. **Transparency in Data and Report:** NITI Aayog and the agencies participating in planning should maintain transparency in data. The government should release the data on the rationale, the

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process of creation, consulted groups etc. in public domain. This will give a holistic view to critics and supporters.

7. **Enhanced International Cooperation:** India should enhance cooperation with countries like Japan, South Korea etc. This will help in developing successful island development models.

8. **Exploration of other Islands:** Other islands in the the Nicobar group, apart from GNI, like Little Nicobar, Nancowry, Kamorta and Katchall can be explored. These could accommodate most components of such a project, without risking environmental, ecological and anthropological damage on large scale.

CONCLUSION:

India needs to achieve the Vision of *"Happy and prosperous islanders on ecologically-protected Islands".* To achieve that, India needs to adopt development plans that are technically feasible, economically profitable, socially acceptable as well as transparent.

Read More: **The Indian Express, Wikipedia**
UPSC Syllabus- GS 3: Environment

AI in Judiciary – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

The Supreme Court of India has expressed serious institutional concerns over the use of AI-generated content involving non-existent and fake judgments by a trial court while passing an order. Last year, a trial court judge in Vijayawada dismissed a case citing four Supreme Court judgments; however, it was later found that none of those judgments actually existed. Earlier, in July 2025, the Kerala HC has published a set of guidelines for AI use by district judiciary. As the first policy in the country directly addressing AI use in judicial processes & setting out strict safeguards, it is timely.

The SC also released a 'White Paper on AI & Judiciary' in Nov 2025 – which identified 'Fabrication of Cases & Hallucination' as the primary risk associated with the use of AI. The document noted that AI tools can hallucinate judgments, citations, quotes, or refer to any legislation that may not be in existence.

AI tools, from document translation to defect identification in filings, are expected to improve the speed & efficiency of our judicial system, however, the use of these tools are not without risks.

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What is the significance of AI in Judiciary?

1. **Reducing Case Backlogs & Delays: AI tools can assist with case prioritization, scheduling, and tracking. By analyzing case timelines and historical data, AI can predict which cases are likely to be delayed, allowing court staff to allocate resources more effectively.**

2. **Promoting Accessibility & Inclusivity: AI-powered tools like the Supreme Court Vidhik Anuvaad Software (SUVACE) can translate legal documents and judgments from English to various Indian languages, breaking down language barriers and making legal information more accessible to the public.**

3. **Legal Research: AI tools can analyze historical judgments, statutes, and legal texts to identify relevant precedents and legal arguments in a fraction of the time it would take a human. This helps lawyers to build stronger cases and judges to make more informed decisions.**

4. **Predictive Analytics: AI can analyze patterns in past judgments to provide predictive insights into potential case outcomes. This can contribute to a more consistent application of the law, reducing the element of subjective judgment in similar cases. However, this is primarily for informational purposes and does not determine the final ruling.**

5. **Transparency & Public Trust: Digital records and AI-powered dashboards improve transparency in judicial processes, enabling effective monitoring and public accountability. The e-Courts initiative and AI tools make court proceedings and orders more visible and easier to follow for the public.**

Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Courts in India:

- **e-Courts Project & AI Tools: India's judiciary is integrating AI primarily through the e-Courts Mission Mode Project with the aim of improving administrative efficiency and reducing case backlog.**

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- **SUPACE (Supreme Court Portal for Assistance in Court Efficiency) uses machine learning to help process case files, extract facts, and assist judges with research and summarization.**
- **SUVAS facilitates automated translation of judgments from English to regional languages, improving accessibility.**
- **Adalat.AI: In 2025, the Kerala High Court mandated the use of Adalat.AI in its subordinate courts to record witness depositions. It converts speech to text instantly, replacing manual stenography and speeding up trial proceedings.**

What are the challenges?

1. **Biasness & Ethical Concerns: AI can perpetuate prejudices found in historical legal data, leading to potentially discriminatory outcomes based on race, gender, or socio-economic status. Bias in criminal risk profiling or sentencing recommendations can undermine the principles of justice and fairness.**

2. **Accuracy & Reliability: AI tools may produce inaccurate results, fabricate information (AI hallucinations), or generate fake legal citations and facts, which poses dangers for judicial decision-making. Dependence on unreliable or incomplete databases can further skew outcomes. For e.g. OpenAI's Whisper, an AI-powered speech recognition system, was reported to hallucinate entire phrases & sentences, especially when people spoke with longer pauses between words.**

3. **Complexity of Legal Reasoning: Human judgment in law involves nuanced interpretation, contextual understanding, moral reasoning, and empathy, which AI currently struggles to replicate.**

4. **Human   Rights   &   Due   Process: Replacing or heavily supplementing human judgment with algorithmic decision-making can threaten fundamental rights – such as the right to a fair trial and appeal. Over-reliance could reduce   complex   human   experiences   to   mere   statistics. At more structural level, AI risks reducing adjudication into rule-based interferences, overlooking the combination of human judgement, a specific context, and relevance of precedents that impact judicial decision making.**

5. **Lack of Regulation: India lacks comprehensive legislation or clear policy for regulating AI use in the judiciary; most existing rules are adapted from older laws not tailored for AI's complexities. As a result, courts in India have shown inconsistent approaches to AI adoption, with some encouraging cautious use and others, like Kerala High Court, banning AI tools from judicial decision-making.**

What can be the way forward?

1. **Capacity Building: Conduct nationwide training for critical AI literacy for judges, court staff, and lawyers to raise awareness, build digital literacy, and promote effective use of AI tools. In addition to capacity building to use AI tools, programmes are also required to understand the limitations of the systems deployed. Judicial academies & bar associations, in collaboration with AI governance experts, are well placed to facilitate such capacity building.**

2. **Human Oversight & Judicial Discretion: AI should be an assistive, not a substitute, tool – final decision-making authority must always remain with human judges. Require judicial officers to review and, if necessary, override AI-recommended outcomes when context or justice so demand.**

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3. **Develop Regulatory & Ethical frameworks:** Enact legislation and guidelines that define the permissible uses of AI in courts with emphasis on human rights, fairness, accountability, and explainability. Mandate regular audits and ethical reviews of AI tools used in judicial processes to ensure they are unbiased and transparent.

4. **Address Biasness Issue:** Use diverse, updated, and representative datasets for developing and training AI systems to minimize bias and errors. Continually monitor, validate, and retrain AI models to avoid perpetuating systemic injustice.

5. **Right to be informed:** Guidelines are needed to shape individual use of generative AI for research & judgement writing. If AI is used in adjudication process, litigants must have a right to be informed. Similarly, litigants & lawyers have a right to know if AI is being used in certain courtrooms. Litigants may be allowed to optout of pilots or fully-deployed AI if they have any concerns about safeguards or human oversight.

6. **Experts' help:** Dedicated specialists of AI in courtrooms can give the courts clearer guidance in adopting AI tools as part of comprehensive planning. Vision Document for Phase-III of eCourts Project acknowledges the need to create technology offices to guide courts in assessing, selecting, and overseeing the implementation of complex digital solutions like AI.

Conclusion:

Adoption of AI in judiciary is significant to make it more efficient, accessible & transparent, however, it should not eclipse the nuanced reasoning & human decision-making that is at the heart of the adjudicatory process.

Read More: **The Hindu, The Indian Express**
UPSC GS-2: Judiciary

Fertility Rate in India – Explained Pointwise

The falling fertility rate in India is dominating the demographic shifts debate in India. According to a Lancet study, the fertility rate in India **may dip to 1.29 by 2050**, which will be **far lower than the replacement rate of 2.1**.
In Southern states in India, like **Kerala** and **Tamil Nadu**, the **Total Fertility Rate** (TFR) is already below 1.9. This has led to emerging concerns in South India **regarding the fall in fertility rates**, ageing population and their decreased representation. Recently, the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu announced that his government is working on a **law to incentivize families to have more children**.
While the declining fertility rate has its own advantages, the **fertility rate dropping below the replacement rate** has some **perilous consequences**. However, raising fertility in poorer states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh will increase the risk of exacerbation of socioeconomic challenges.

In this article we will delve into the issue of declining fertility rate in India.

What is Total Fertility Rate (TFR)? What is the trend of falling fertility rate in India?

- **Fertility Rate/TFR:** Total fertility rate (TFR) refers to the **total number of children born or likely to be born to a woman** (15-49 years) in her lifetime.
- **Replacement level fertility rate:** A TFR of 2.1 is known as replacement level fertility rate. It is the **level of fertility** at which a **population exactly replaces itself** from one generation to the next.

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- **TFR< Replacement level fertility rate:** TFR lower than 2.1 children per woman indicates that **a generation is not producing enough children to replace itself**. This eventually leads to an outright reduction in population.

Data Pointing to falling fertility rate in India:

National Family Health Survey (NFHS 2019-21) Data:

- **India's Total Fertility Rates (TFR) has reached 2.0 at the national level.** The total fertility rate, was as high as 6 or more in the 1950s.
- **The TFR is at 1.6 in urban areas and 2.1 in rural India.**
- **Bihar, Meghalaya, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Manipur remain the only states with fertility rates above the replacement level and the national average.**

Source- Livemint

Source- Livemint
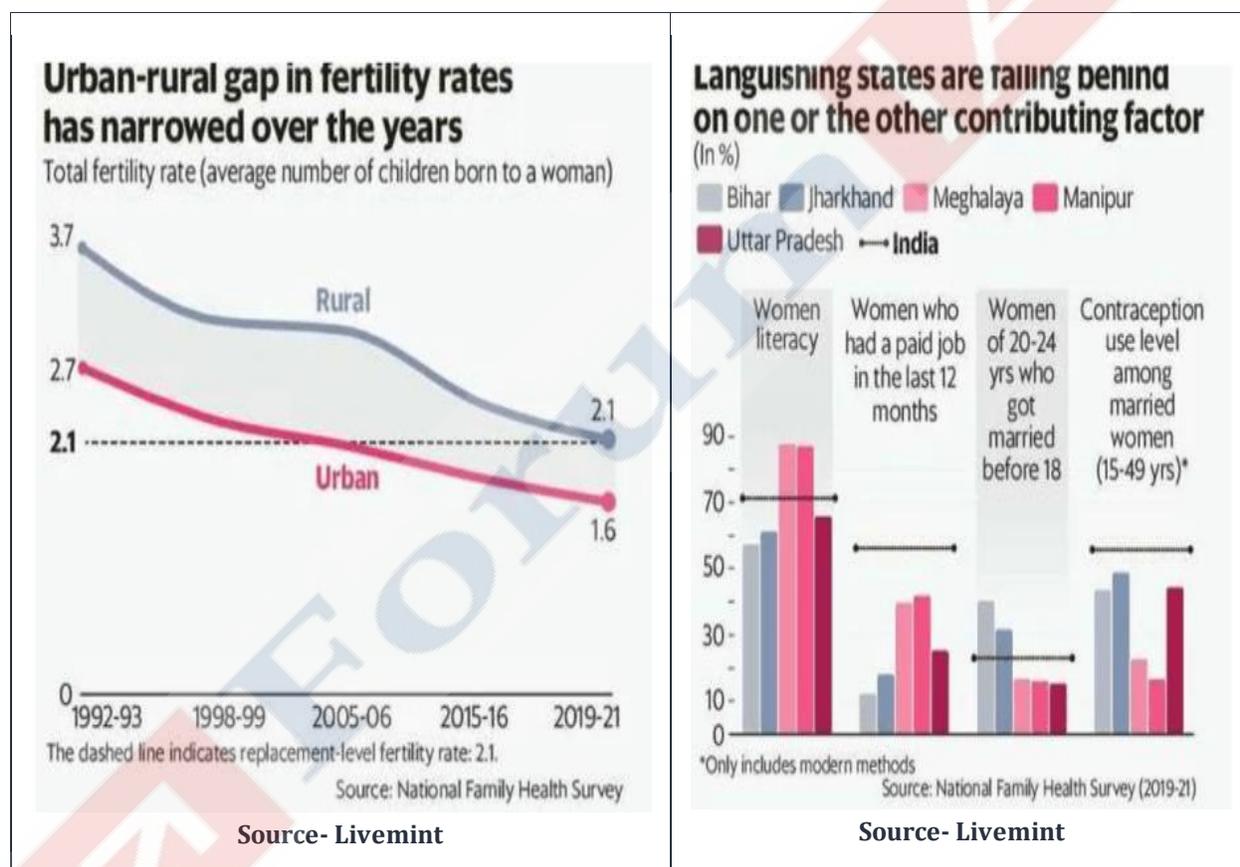
Global Burden of Disease, Injuries and Risk Factors Study (GBD) 2021:

- **India's TFR which was 6.18 in 1950, reduced to 4.60 in 1980 and further declined to 1.91 in 2021.**
- Worldwide also, the TFR has more than halved in the last 70 years, from around **five children for each woman in 1950 to 2.2 children in 2021.**

Key Data of the Report of MoH&FW:

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With the 2021 Census delayed, the latest population projections from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare show a **rapidly ageing population across India**. According to the projections, the percentage of people aged 60 and above is expected to have a significant rise in Southern states like **Andhra Pradesh** and **Kerala**, where the fertility rate dropped earlier than in Northern states like **Uttar Pradesh**.

1. **India's population increase:** India's population will grow by **31.1 crore** between 2011 and 2036, out of which **17 crore people will be added by just five north Indian states** of Bihar, UP, Maharashtra, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh.

2. **Low contribution to population increase by Southern States:** The Southern states of **AP**, **Karnataka**, **Kerala**, **Telangana**, and **Tamil Nadu**, will contribute only **2.9 crore**, or **9%** to the population increase.

3. **Increase in Share of Elderly population in India:** The elderly population (60+) will double from **10 crore in 2011** to **23 crore by 2036**. The share of elderly will rise from **8.4%** to **14.9%**.

4. **Regional Differences in Ageing Trends:** In Southern state of Kerala, the elderly population will be **25% of the states' population by 2036**. While the states like UP will remain younger, with elderly making up **12% of the population of the state by 2036**.

What are the reasons for falling fertility rate in India?

1. **Family Planning and Welfare Programmes introduced post independence:** There has been positive impact of the family welfare programmes, which included **maternal and child health-related cash transfer inducements to reduce fertility**.

2. **Improvement of Maternal and Child Health:** Another major reason for falling fertility rate in India, is the **substantial decline in the infant mortality** and **maternal mortality rates**. The decline in these rates guaranteed child survival and made small families a norm in India.

3. **Behavioral Changes:** The behavioural changes due to campaigns such as '*hum do humaare do*' and **use of contraceptives** have changed the mindset of the Indian population and nudged them to reduce fertility rates.

4. **Reversal of intergenerational flow of wealth:** With the reversal of intergenerational flow of wealth, **parents do not receive much benefit from their children the way they used to receive**. This has influenced their decision to have an additional child that would involve a substantial cost of bringing them up.

5. **Women empowerment:** The **rise of female literacy**, **women's participation in the workforce**, **career consciousness**, **financial returns** and **economic independence** have empowered Indian women to reconsider of the option of having a second child.

6. **Choice of adoption:** There is a significant increase in the **exercise of choice of adoption over child-rearing**, which has contributed to a decrease in the fertility rates in India.

What is the significance of falling fertility rates for India?

1. **Improved labour productivity leading to accelerated economic growth:** The decline in population growth would **increase the amount of capital resources and infrastructure available in per capita terms**. A young skilled workforce would improve labour productivity, leading to accelerated economic growth.

2. **Better employment conditions for workers:** A lower working force population will result in **improved working conditions** and **higher wages** for the workers. It would also lead to **elimination of wage discrimination for migrant workers** and the **mitigation of their security concerns** in the industrially developed states (southern states, Maharashtra, Gujarat), that have low fertility rates.

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3. **Enhanced participation of women in workforce:** With decline in fertility rate, less time is needed for childcare, which enhances the participation of women in workforce. For ex- **Improved share of women in MNREGA employment in Southern States.**

4. **Improvement in quality of Social service deliveries:** Falling fertility rate improves the educational, health and skills of Indian population due to **increase in the per capita availability of social sector resources and infrastructure** like schools, colleges and hospitals.

5. **Reduced pressure on environment and agriculture:** The **impact of environmental problems** such as global warming, desertification, loss of farmland, pollution and use of non-renewable materials **will be reduced due to decline in population**.

What are the concerns with the fertility rates falling below the replacement levels?

1. **Demographic disadvantage:** Fertility rates, falling below the replacement level of TFR 2.1, leads to the problem of demographic disadvantage of an ageing population. For ex- **China's demographic disadvantage due to falling fertility rate**.

2. **Increase in 'non-developmental expenditure':** Drastic fall in fertility rate will lead to increase in government's non-developmental expenditure on pensions and subsidies, due to **increase in aged population** and **shrinking of workforce**.

3. **Labour shortages endangering economic stability:** Substantial decrease in the working age population will India's economic and social stability. For ex- **Decline in Japan's economic growth rates due to shrinking labour force**.

4. **Less 'brain pool' for innovation:** **Young people are the 'brain pool' for entrepreneurship, innovation** and **new technologies development**. With less young people in the population pyramid due to decrease in fertility rate, the potential 'brain pool' for innovation will be lesser.

5. **Potential social imbalances:** The Declining rate of fertility can lead to social imbalances due to gendered preference of having a male child. This can lead to an **increase in the son-meta preference** and **skewed sex-ratios**.

6. **Concerns regarding the lower political representation:** Southern states of India have transitioned to lower fertility rates earlier. There are fears that they **may lose parliamentary seats after constituency delimitation**, while Northern states with **larger populations could gain more seats**.

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. **Reduce the obsession with pro-natalist policies:** Countries that have tried financial incentives or policies to increase birth rates have seen limited success. The **model of Scandinavian countries** of **providing strong family and childcare support** and **gender equality measures**, can be followed by India.

2. **Addressing the Internal Migration:** Internal migration from **Northern to Southern states**, can help balance the working-age population in Southern states. States like US have benefitted from the pro-immigration policies, which has helped sustain economic growth and labour productivity.

3. **Tweaking of economic policy and agenda:** **Economic policies that stimulate growth and job creation, alongside social security and pension reforms**, will also be essential in mitigating the impacts of declining fertility rate.

4. **Designing policies for ethical and effective migration:** The policies for ethical and effective inter-state migration must be designed to **offset the regional imbalances** due to falling rates of fertility in southern states of India.

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5. **Men assuming greater household responsibilities:** Men taking up greater responsibilities of household and care work would help women in **better management of motherhood with their careers**. This would consequently lead to working women choosing child-rearing instead of adoption.

6. **Formalization of caregiving economy:** According to a NITI Aayog report, **healthcare offered at home can replace up to 65% of unnecessary hospital visits** and reduce hospital costs by 20%. Well-trained caregivers possessing empathetic outlook towards elderly need to be provided formal and better work place conditions. **Recognition of "home" as a place for providing care** and as a **"place of work" for caregivers** will be the first step towards elderly care.

7. **Comprehensive policy on home based care:** The Southern states must draft a comprehensive policy for **streamlining of vocational training, nomenclature, roles, and career progression of the caregivers**. It must also streamline the registry of caregivers, ensure transparency and accountability and establish grievance redressal mechanisms.

8. **Replication of Switzerland's 'Time Bank' initiative:** Under this initiative, **the younger generation start to save 'time' by taking care of senior citizens**. Later, they can use the saved 'time' when they get old, sick, or in need of someone to take care of them. This initiative can be used by the South Indian States.

Read More- [The Indian Express](#), [The Hindu](#)
UPSC Syllabus- GS 1- Population and Associated Issues

Social Media Ban for Children – Explained Pointwise

Karnataka & Andhra Pradesh are set to ban social media for children to prevent the adverse effects of increasing mobile phone use. While the Karnataka proposes to ban the social media for children under-16 years of age, Andhra Pradesh would impose the restriction on children below 13 years. At the global level, Indonesia has also put restrictions on social media access for children under-16, citing threats from online pornography, cyberbullying, online fraud & internet addiction.

Source: Law Street Journal

Where around the world are governments imposing bans on social media for children?

AUSTRALIA	• In 2024, Australia proposed one of the strictest regulations globally. • A legal ban is active for anyone under 16 & there are no parental exceptions. • Platforms like Meta Platforms (Facebook, Instagram) and TikTok may be required to verify users' ages and block under-age accounts. • Platforms face fines up to $50 million for non-compliance.
FRANCE	• Ban on social media for under-15s. • France passed a law requiring parental consent for children under 15 to create social media accounts.
UNITED STATES	• Utah: Social media use for minors requires parental consent and platforms must implement age verification. • Arkansas: Similar parental consent laws for minors joining social media.
CHINA	• China has introduced strict digital controls for minors. • Platforms like Douyin (Chinese version of TikTok) provide "youth mode", limiting screen time and restricting content.
UNITED KINGDOM	• The Online Safety Act 2023 requires platforms to protect children from harmful content and strengthen age-verification systems.
INDONESIA	• Ban for those under 16 is set to begin enforcement on March 28, 2026. • It specifically targets "high-risk" platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and gaming platforms.
INDIA	• Karnataka proposed a ban for under-16s. • Andhra Pradesh explored restrictions for under-13s.

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What are the arguments in favour of social media ban?

1. **Protection of Developing Brains:**
   - **Adolescents are highly sensitive to dopamine hits from social validation (likes and comments). This can lead to a compulsive need for digital "rewards" that interferes with real-world responsibilities and sleep.**
   - **The prefrontal cortex, which handles decision-making and impulse control, is not fully developed until the mid-20s. Proponents argue that children lack the "neurological brakes" to resist addictive features like infinite scroll or autoplay.**

2. **Mental Health & Wellbeing:**
   - **Social media is strongly linked to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem — particularly in teenagers and young adults. Constant exposure to curated, idealized lives fuels unhealthy comparison. A ban (or age-based restriction) could protect vulnerable groups from these harms.**
   - **The Economic Survey 2025-26 warned of rising digital addiction. Heavy use is consistently associated with higher rates of anxiety, depression, and feelings of hopelessness among teenagers.**

3. **Combating Cyberbullying and Online Harassment:** Children are exposed to inappropriate content, predators, cyberbullying, and addictive design patterns they lack the maturity to resist. Unlike traditional schoolyard bullying, cyberbullying can follow a child home and invade their private space at any time of day or night, leaving them with no safe haven. Several countries (like Australia) have moved toward banning social media for under-16s on these grounds.

4. **Combating Misinformation:** Social media platforms are major vectors for the rapid spread of false information — about health, elections, and public safety. Algorithms actively reward outrage and sensationalism over accuracy, making organic correction difficult.

5. **Reducing Political Polarization:** Echo chambers and algorithmic content curation push users toward increasingly extreme viewpoints. This deepens societal divisions, undermines democratic deliberation, and can fuel real-world violence.

6. **Data Privacy & Surveillance:** Platforms harvest enormous amounts of personal data, often without meaningful user consent, and sell it to advertisers or expose it through breaches. Children are also often unable to fully grasp the long-term consequences of their "digital footprint." A ban is, thus, seen as a way to prevent tech companies from harvesting the personal data of minors before they are old enough to give informed consent.

What are the arguments against the social media ban?

1. **Freedom of Expression & Access to Information:** Social media is a major channel through which young people access news, education, and public discourse. A ban restricts their right to information and self-expression — rights that apply to children too, and which many argue should be taught to be exercised responsibly rather than blocked entirely.

2. **Social Connection & Belonging:** For many children, especially those who are isolated, LGBTQ+, or living in remote areas, social media provides a vital sense of community and belonging that may not exist in their immediate physical environment. A ban could leave these vulnerable children feeling more isolated and at higher risk of mental health crises.

3. **Practical Unenforceability:** Age-based bans are notoriously difficult to enforce. Children routinely bypass restrictions using VPNs, borrowed accounts, or falsified ages. This may simply push usage underground, making it *less* safe and harder for parents to monitor. By using VPNs

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or moving to unmoderated, fringe platforms, children may encounter far more dangerous content and predators than they would on moderated apps like Instagram or TikTok.

4. **Undermining Educational Resources:** Many educational resources and learning communities exist on social media. Bans could limit access to valuable information and peer support structures. In today's digital age, social media is integral to socialization, education, and skills development. Bans may hinder children's ability to adapt to a tech-centric world.

5. **Civic Engagement and Activism:** Social media has been a powerful tool for young people to organize around issues they care about, from climate change to social justice, allowing them to have a voice in public discourse.

6. **Parental Authority:** Many argue that decisions about a child's media use belong to parents, not the state. A government-imposed ban overrides parental judgment and sets a precedent for state overreach into family life.

What can be the way forward?

1. **Age-Appropriate Regulation, Not Outright Bans:** Rather than blanket bans, governments should mandate that platforms design child-safe experiences — no algorithmic content pushing, no targeted advertising, simplified privacy settings, and age-appropriate content filters. The UK's Age Appropriate Design Code is a model worth studying.

2. **Platform Accountability & Liability:** Mandate that platforms implement strong privacy settings for minors by default (e.g., private accounts, disabling location sharing, turning off direct messaging from strangers). These should not be opt-in settings that children have to find; they should be the default for all underage users.

3. **Digital Literacy Education:** Schools should embed critical digital literacy into curricula — teaching children how algorithms work, how to spot misinformation, how to manage screen time, and how to protect their privacy. Empowering children to navigate online spaces is more sustainable than shielding them indefinitely.

4. **Tiered Access by Age:** A graduated model makes more sense than a binary ban. Under-13s could face strict restrictions; 13–15s could have supervised, limited access; 16+ could have near-full access with some protections still in place. This mirrors how society treats other age-sensitive activities like driving or voting.

5. **Parental Support and Resources:** Provide parents with accessible resources and training to understand the apps their children are using. Instead of just setting a ban, parents can be empowered to have ongoing conversations with their children about their online lives, set family rules around screen time, and use parental control tools effectively.

6. **International Coordination:** Social media is borderless, so national bans alone are limited in effect. International cooperation — through bodies like the UN or G20 — is needed to set global minimum standards for how platforms treat minors.

> **UPSC GS-2: Vulnerable Sections**
> **Read More: The Hindu**

Obesity in India – Explained Pointwise

The World Obesity Atlas, released last week, estimates that more than 40mn children in India are either overweight or obese. Hence, India now ranks second globally in the number of overweight & obese children. This trend is driven by sedentary lifestyles, urbanisation, and greater access to processed

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foods. Also, unlike the developed countries where the dietary transition unfolded gradually over several decades, in India much of this shift has occurred in last 15 years.

Obesity in India

OBESITY AND ITS MEASUREMENT

Obesity- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), obesity is defined as an abnormal or excessive accumulation of fat that poses health risks.

How is obesity measured

1. **Adults over the age of 20 years**
Obese- Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 kg/m2 or more.
Underweight- Body Mass Index (BMI) is less than 18 kg/m2.
NOTE- BMI is a person's weight in kilograms divided by the square of height in meters.
2. **School-aged children and adolescents between 5 and 19 years**
Obese- BMI is two standard deviations more than the mean.
Underweight- BMI is two standard deviations below the mean.

LANCET DATA REGARDING OBESITY IN INDIA

1. **More obese women as compared to men**- Obesity in women has increased from 1.2% in 1990 to 9.8% in 2022. There are 44 million women living with obesity in 2022.

2. **Increase in Men Obesity**- Obesity in men has increased by 4.9% from 1990 to 2022. There are 26 million men living with obesity in 2022.

3. **Significant Increase In Childhood Obesity**- The number of obese boys has increased from 0.2 million in 1990 to 7.3 million in 2022. The number of obese girls has increased from 0.2 million in 1990 to 5.2 million in 2022.

Data regarding underweight in India
1. **Underweight Men and Women**- 13.7% of women and 12.5% of men are underweight.
2. **Underweight Children**- India has the highest number of underweight girls (20.3%) in the world. India has the second highest underweight boys (21.7%) in the world.

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What is obesity?

- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), obesity is defined as an **abnormal** or **excessive accumulation of fat** that poses health risks.
- It is a medical condition that increases the risk of other health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and certain cancers.
- The most common screening tool for obesity is the Body Mass Index (BMI).

How is obesity measured?

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2. **Underweight Children-** India has the highest number of underweight girls in the world. **20.3% of Indian girls are underweight. 21.7% of Indian boys are underweight**, which is the second highest in the world.

> **Read More- Lancet study on Global Obesity rates**

What are the reasons behind the increasing obesity in India?

1. **Unhealthy Lifestyle-** Lack of healthy lifestyle is a major reason for increasing obesity rates in India. For ex- **Lack of physical activities such as walks or gyms**, lack of proper sleep.

2. **Lack of proper diet- Cheaper and easily available junk food** has replaced the nutritious food in the dietary intakes of Indian population. For ex- According to recent **Household Consumption Survey**, Indians are spending less on cereals and pulses and more on beverages, refreshments and processed food.

3. **Increased income and urbanization-** Increased income levels have led to a rise in the consumption of foods high in **fats**, **sugar** and **low physical activity**.

4. **Lack of awareness-** There has been a general lack of awareness about **healthy eating habits** and **the guidelines issued by FSSAI**. Since Health is a state subject, there have been **implementation challenges** in ensuring **proper implementation of FSSAI guidelines**.

5. **Growth of Ultra-processed food industry-** Ultra processed food industry has boomed in India, leading to increased intake of transfat in India. According to a **joint study** conducted by **WHO** and **ICRIER**, India's ultra-processed food industry has grown at a **CAGR of 13.37%** in terms of retail sales value between 2011 and 2021.

6. **Obesity no longer dependent on economic capacity-** Obesity is **no longer the disease of the rich in India**. Eating junk food is cheaper and easier. For ex- The cost of samosas and pakoras available at roadside shacks is less than fruit and vegetables.

7. **Generational burden:** According to a UNICEF Survey, the nutritional deficits among children are often a carryover of the poor dietary habits of their mothers.

What are the negative impacts of Obesity in India?

1. **Individual Health Implications-** Overweight adults and children are at greater risk for non-communicable diseases. According to WHO, excess bodyweight during childhood significantly increases the risk of conditions such as type 2 diabetes & cardiovascular diseases later in life.

2. **Improper development of Children in formative years-** Obesity in children results in **stunted physical** and **cognitive development**.

3. **Psychosocial Impact-** Obese Individuals face psychosocial challenges like, **body image issues** and **mental health concerns** due to societal stigmas associated with weight.

4. **Economic Burden-** Obesity increases the economic burden due to **productivity losses** on account of **decreased work efficiency** and **absenteeism**.

5. **Public Health Challenges-** Obesity is a major reason behind the **growth of Non-Communicable Diseases** (**NCDs**), like **diabetes**, **cancer**, **hypertension**, **cardiovascular diseases** etc. This has increased strain on the fragile public healthcare system in India.

6. **Social Inequality and Disparities-** Obesity **perpetuates a cycle of health challenges** and **economic disadvantages** among the vulnerable sections, exacerbates existing socio-economic disparities. **Women are disproportionately affected by obesity**, facing challenges related to reproductive health, maternal health, and overall well-being.

What are the government initiatives to reduce the obesity burden?

The government has launched multiple initiatives which focuses on reducing obesity, and associated NCDs.

1. **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke (NPCDCS)-** It is being implemented under the National Health Mission. It **aims to screen** and **ensure early interventions** to **check the obesity-related risk factors** from becoming complicated.

2. **Ayushman Bharat Health Wellness Centre scheme-** Preventive aspect of hypertension and NCDs is being strengthened under Comprehensive Primary Health Care by **promotion of wellness activities** and **targeted communication at the community level**.

3. **Eat Right Movement-** The Eat Right India movement is an initiative of the **Government of India** and the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India** (FSSAI) to transform the country's food system in order to ensure safe, healthy and sustainable food for all Indians.

4. **FSSAI limits for transfats-** FSSAI has issued **guidelines limiting trans fatty acids in oils and fats to be not more than 2% by weight**.

5. **FSS (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020-** It mandates that labels should mention **food allergens, nutritional information including fat**, **trans fat**, salt, sugar, added sugar etc.

What should be the way forward?

1. **Awareness about the grave dangers of obesity-** The medical community must create awareness about the **NPCDCS guidelines**, which recommend **annual screening for excess weight in children as young as two to six years old**.

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2. **Improving the access to nutrient rich food**- The access of vulnerable sections to healthy nutrition must be enhanced by measures such as **targeted cash transfers, vouchers for healthy foods, free healthy school meals**, and **primary care-based nutritional interventions**.

3. **Initiatives to reduce obesity among adults**- **Yoga days can be fixed in a week in offices**, welfare societies. Also, under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, **cleaning of parks and other spaces can be promoted**, so that adults can come for exercise.

4. **Initiatives to reduce obesity among Children**- Strict implementation of RTE act norms, by **implementing mandatory minimum grounds size and other sports infrastructure** in schools. **Construction of parks and open spaces in colonies**, so that children can play outside rather than remaining busy with indoor activity like video games, computer games.

5. **Disincentivising the ultra-processed food industry**- **Higher taxes** on unhealthy processed and junk food, and **front-of-pack nutrition labelling** to guide consumers must be implemented.

> **Read More: Indian Express**
> **UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Government interventions for Health**

Farm Loan Waiver – Explained Pointwise

The Maharashtra government has announced a Rs 35,000cr waiver scheme last week – which is against the caution & advisories by RBI against farm loan waivers & that could potentially impact credit culture & state finances.

What is the need for farm loan waiver?

The need of providing loan waivers arises due to following factors:

1. **Skewed procurement:** Physical procurement by FCI is conducted only for rice and wheat leaving out other crops.

2. **Rainfed agriculture:** Around 52% farm area is still unirrigated and dependent on rainfall, while drip irrigation and sprinkler is limited to 1.6% and 0.8% families respectively.

3. **Informal credit disbursal:** Non-institutional credit to agriculture is around 40%, which not only has exorbitant interest rates but also is exploitative resulting in reduced farm incomes and increased farmer suicides.

4. **Problem of surplus or cobweb phenomenon:** After the prices of an agricultural commodity shoot during a season of scarcity, farmers resort to boosting the production on the premise of the pre-existing demand and prices, leading to a problem of plenty in the next season when prices of the same commodity are at a low.

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● FARM LOAN WAIVER PROGRAMMES

State	Year	Amount (in Rs cr)
Andhra Pradesh	2014-15	24,000
Telangana	2014-15	17,000
Tamil Nadu	2016-17	52,800
Maharashtra	2017-18	34,020
Uttar Pradesh	2017-18	36,360
Punjab	2017-18	10,000
Karnataka	2018-19	44,000
Rajasthan	2018-19	18,000
Madhya Pradesh	2018-19	36,500
Chhattisgarh	2018-19	6,100
Maharashtra	2019–20	22,000
Telangana	2024	31,000
Jharkhand	2024	2,000–3,000

SOURCE: RBI WORKING GROUP REPORT

What are the arguments in favour of farm loan waiver?

1. **Preventing Suicides:** Indebtedness is a leading driver of farmer suicides. Waivers act as a humanitarian intervention to provide immediate psychological and financial relief to families trapped in a debt spiral.

2. **Response to Natural Calamities:** With over 50% of Indian agriculture still rain-fed, a single season of drought, unseasonal rain, or floods can wipe out a farmer's entire income, making loan repayment physically impossible.

3. **Small and Fragmented Landholdings:** Roughly 85% of Indian farmers are small and marginal (owning <2 hectares). These holdings lack the scale to absorb shocks from market price volatility or crop failure.

4. **Market Failures:** Farmers often do not receive the Minimum Support Price (MSP) due to a lack of storage, cold chains, and a high dependence on middlemen. This keeps their profit margins so thin that even a minor setback leads to insolvency.

5. **Boosting Rural Consumption:** Removing the burden of debt interest frees up household income for essential spending on health and education, which can help stimulate the broader rural economy.

6. **Breaking the Default Cycle:** Once a farmer defaults on an institutional loan, they are barred from taking fresh credit. This often forces them into the hands of informal moneylenders who charge exorbitant interest rates.

7. **Enabling Fresh Investment:** By clearing the "debt overhang," waivers allow farmers to become eligible for new bank loans to purchase seeds, fertilizers, and equipment for the next cropping cycle.

8. **Limitations of Minimum Support Prices:** Only 22 crops are covered under MSP scheme and only about 10% farmers are aware of existence of MSP. Also when market prices fall below MSP, a majority of farmers who sell produce directly to markets are affected.

What are the arguments against the farm loan waiver?

1. **Impact on Capital Expenditure:** To fund a waiver, states often have to cut spending in other areas. Studies (such as those by the Madras School of Economics) show that governments frequently reduce capital expenditure—money meant for long-term assets like irrigation, roads, and storage—to manage the fiscal deficit.

2. **Fiscal Deficit Targets:** Large waivers make it difficult for states to stick to the 3% fiscal deficit limit mandated by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act.

3. **Moral Hazard:** Even farmers who have the capacity to repay may intentionally default in anticipation of a future waiver.

4. **Promotes credit indiscipline:** Research by the RBI indicates that after waiver announcements, repayment rates often drop even among those not eligible, as the "expectation" of a future bailout sets in.

5. **Worsening NPAs:** This behavior leads to a spike in Non-Performing Assets (NPAs). For instance, following several state-level waivers in 2017, the agricultural NPAs of some public sector banks spiked significantly.

6. **Formal vs. Informal Debt:** Waivers only apply to institutional credit (Banks, PACS). However, the most distressed small and marginal farmers often rely on informal moneylenders, who charge much higher rates but are never covered by government waivers.

7. **Provides relief to few farmers only:** Small and marginal farmers constitute around 86% of all farmers in India and as per Niti Aayog, among this section those who avail themselves of

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institutional loans, are very few, in some states about 25% only, which is also the reason behind failure of loan waivers.

8. **Access Gap:** Data suggests that only about 50% of eligible farmers actually receive benefits due to administrative hurdles, documentation issues, or the fact that many small farmers have never had access to formal bank credit in the first place.

9. **Credit Squeeze:** Banks may become cautious about lending to the agricultural sector in states with a history of frequent waivers, fearing future defaults. This inadvertently reduces the flow of fresh, formal credit to the very people the government is trying to help.

10. **Short-term Fix:** Waivers treat the *symptom* (debt) rather than the *cause* (low productivity, market volatility, and climate risk).

11. **Populist Tool:** Critics argue that political parties use waivers as a "quick win" to secure votes, which diverts attention from necessary structural reforms like agricultural marketing (e-NAM), crop diversification, and cold chain infrastructure.

What can be the way forward?

Short term measures to offset the effect of loan waivers:

1. **Waiving only a portion of loan:** Waiving only a portion of the loan instead of placing a cap on the quantum of loan waiver will be an improvement towards averting moral hazards.

2. **Fixed cash subsidy per acre:** Instead of loan waivers government may provide a fixed cash subsidy per acre, by digitizing and identifying plots, as demonstrated by Rythu Bandhu Scheme of the Telangana government, which would cover all farmers.

3. **Prohibiting loan waivers during elections:** The Election Commission should prohibit announcement of loan waivers at the turn of elections to stem this populist practice.

4. **Dismantling the informal credit-crop nexus (Arthiya system):** Freeing the farmers from the tyranny of middlemen by reforming the commission agent system and promoting formal financial inclusion of farmers to bring them into direct contact with state institutions as around 40% credit to agriculture is non-institutional.

5. **Restructuring loans:** Instead of waiving loans, banks can restructure farm loans as done by NBFCs. This 'restructuring' will allow farmers to take a loan for next crop, and then start repaying both loans together, which will have different tenures, without affecting state deficits.

6. **Aligning export policies with domestic production:** During a surplus, export tariffs should be automatically reduced and during low production a cut in import tariffs should automatically click in for effective price realization of farmers without any need of government intervention.

7. **Targeted action:** To obviate the need of announcing loan waivers for whole state, government must focus on 29 highly vulnerable and disadvantaged districts suffering from low income and high climate vulnerability through special programmes.

Long term steps which could eliminate the need of loan waivers:

1. **Crop diversification:** Combating credit risk in the farm sector rests also on crop diversification and cross-holding of risks between agriculture and allied activities, such as animal husbandry.

2. **Tenancy reforms and land consolidation and FPOs:** Land consolidation and formation of Farmer Producer Organisations would give more bargaining power to farmers and when coupled with tenancy reforms, this would ensure legal status to tenants along with security of tenure. Kerala is the only State that has a tenancy law in place with an implementation mechanism.

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3. **Cooperative farming and push to agro-processing sector:** Cooperative farming will allow small and marginal farmers to take the advantage of their family labour and allow economies of scale to kick in at lower thresholds, thus raising farmer incomes.

4. **APMC to APLM:** States must adopt the Model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing (Promotion and Facilitating) Act (APLM), 2017, to promote agriculture livestock marketing along with overhaul in APMC acts.

5. **Farmers to agripreneurs:** Niti Aayog in its 2022 strategy has proposed further expansion of e-NAM to convert farmers into agripreneurs by incentivizing them to undertake agriculture entrepreneurship activities.

6. **Integration of agriculture with industry:** Primary producers should be integrated with both manufacturing and marketing activities and subsidies and tax concessions given to corporate sector should be given to rural entrepreneurs who are willing to start manufacturing firms that will process local raw materials and employ rural labour.

7. **Reform in procurement:** Government must ensure procurement and price stabilization mechanisms for other commodities also apart from wheat and rice.

CASE STUDY:

Kerala State Farmers' Debt Relief Commission:

Under Kerala initiative, a Commission was established in 2007 and its seven-member team of farmers, legal experts, farm economists, political appointees and others went from village to village, spoke to farmers, screened their loan portfolios and decided on the quantum of relief. Within two years, farmer suicides had fallen sharply.

Instead of bulk farm loan waivers, this is a continuous engagement. Round the year someone is talking to farmers, trying to understand what they are going through and how the state can help.

The relief provided by the commission is not unconditional:

- The loan should be from the cooperative sector, which provides the bulk of farm loans.
- The applicant should be a small or marginal farmer, who owns or has taken on lease a crop area of less than five acres.
- The applicant's annual income should not be over ₹2 lakh.
- The commission sits for several days in a village every month.

In this way benefits reach the needy and this model can be emulated by other states too.

UPSC GS-3: Agriculture
Read More: [Indian Express](#)

Energy Crisis in India – Explained Pointwise

India is currently facing a significant energy crisis primarily triggered by the escalating conflict in West Asia, which has severely disrupted energy supplies through a critical maritime chokepoint (Strait of

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Hormuz). This external shock has laid bare the country's underlying structural vulnerabilities, including a heavy dependence on imports and limited strategic reserves.

Source: Times of India

What is Energy Crisis?

- An energy crisis is a significant bottleneck in the supply of energy resources to an economy. It typically occurs when the demand for energy (electricity, fuel, or heating) far outstrips the available supply, leading to sharp price increases, shortages, and economic instability.

- Core Drivers of a Crisis:

    1. **Geopolitical Conflict:** War or political instability in energy-rich regions can disrupt pipelines or shipping routes. A classic example is the 1973 Oil Crisis, where an embargo led to global shortages.

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2. **Infrastructure Failure:** Aging power grids, lack of maintenance, or a failure to build enough capacity to meet growing populations can lead to systemic collapses.

3. **Natural Disasters:** Extreme weather—like heatwaves that spike air conditioning demand or hurricanes that damage refineries—can paralyze energy systems.

4. **Market Volatility:** Sudden shifts in the global economy or speculation in commodity markets can cause prices to skyrocket, making energy unaffordable even if it is physically available.

5. **The Energy Transition:** As the world moves away from fossil fuels, a "gap" can form if renewable infrastructure (wind, solar, battery storage) isn't scaled up fast enough to replace retiring coal or gas plants.

What are the reasons behind the present energy crisis faced by India?

1. **Conflict in West Asia:** The immediate cause of the current crisis is the war involving Iran, which has directly impacted the Strait of Hormuz:

   1. **Supply Disruptions:** Nearly 30% of India's natural gas and a significant portion of its crude oil transit through Strait of Hormuz. Key suppliers like Qatar and Abu Dhabi have halted or reduced shipments, prompting India's largest gas importer, Petronet LNG, to declare force majeure.

   2. **Price Volatility:** The conflict has driven up global energy prices, with analysts warning of oil potentially exceeding $100 per barrel. For India, every $10 increase in oil prices adds an estimated $13-14 billion to its annual import bill.

   3. **LPG & CNG Shortages:** India imports over 60% of its LPG – with nearly 90% of LPG imports transiting through the Strait of Hormuz. The disruption has caused a severe shortage of cooking gas (LPG) and transport fuel (CNG) in major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru.

2. **Structural Vulnerabilities:** The conflict has exposed India's long-standing structural energy challenges, which magnify the impact of any external shock:

   1. **Overwhelming Import Dependence:** India imports about 88% of its crude oil and a substantial portion of its natural gas needs. This dependence means that international supply disruptions translate directly into domestic shortages and price pressures. India's heavy reliance on shipping routes through geopolitically sensitive chokepoints like Hormuz creates a fundamental energy security vulnerability.

   2. **Limited Strategic Reserves:** The country's energy stockpiles are modest and provide only a limited buffer. Strategic petroleum reserves cover around 10 days of consumption, while LPG and LNG reserves are estimated at only 25-30 days and 10-12 days, respectively.

   3. **Transmission Bottlenecks:** Large amounts of solar and wind power are being "stranded" in states like Rajasthan because the transmission lines (green corridors) are operating far below their intended capacity due to grid stability concerns.

3. **Other Reasons:**

   1. **Early Heatwaves:** February 2026 recorded a 15-year high in power demand, driven by above-normal temperatures that spiked the need for cooling (air conditioning) much earlier than the typical summer peak.

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2. **Industrial Resurgence:** India's manufacturing sector (PMI reaching 56.9) has kept industrial power demand consistently high, accounting for nearly 50% of total consumption.

What are the consequences of the energy crisis?

1. **Business Closures and Job Losses:** The shortage of LPG has hit commercial users the hardest:
   ○ In Mumbai, an estimated 20% of hotels and restaurants have already shut down, with fears that nearly 50% could close within days.
   ○ The industrial town of Morbi in Gujarat, a hub for the tile industry, has seen 170 factories shut down, putting around one lakh people out of work.
   ○ SMEs in sectors like textiles (Tiruppur) and ceramics (Gujarat) are facing imminent shutdowns. Dyeing units in Tiruppur have warned they have only 15 days of gas reserves remaining.

2. **Slower Economic Growth:** Economists warn that sustained high oil prices and supply disruptions could significantly dent India's GDP growth. Estimates suggest growth could be cut by 15 to 40 basis points (0.15% to 0.4%) for the next financial year. In a more extreme scenario, a sustained $50 per barrel increase in oil prices could wipe out over 2% of India's GDP.

3. **Rising Inflation:** The surge in global energy prices is translating into higher input costs across the economy. This is expected to push up the CPI by an estimated 30 to 50 basis points (0.3% to 0.5%) .

4. **Strain on Government Finances and External Balance:** Every $10 increase in the price of a barrel of oil adds an estimated $13-14 billion to India's annual import bill. This widens the current account deficit and puts downward pressure on the Indian Rupee.

5. **Fertilizer Crisis:** Plants are receiving only 70% of their average gas supply. This is particularly critical as farmers prepare for the summer crop cycle, leading to fears of lower yields and future food inflation.

6. **Household LPG Shortages:** While the government has prioritized households for LPG supplies, there are reports of widespread shortages and cylinders being sold in the black market at exorbitant prices.

7. **CNG/Auto-LPG Scarcity:** Long queues have returned to fuel pumps in urban centers. In some cities, the number of auto-rickshaws on the road has dropped by 30% because drivers cannot find fuel.

8. **Aviation:** Airlines are facing higher Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) costs, which will likely translate into significantly higher airfares during the upcoming summer travel season.

What are various initiatives to overcome the current energy crisis?

1. **Invocation of Essential Commodities Act (ECA) 1955:** The government has invoked the Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955, through the Natural Gas (Supply Regulation) Order, 2026. This is a drastic step to stabilize the market:
   a. **Tiered Priority System:** Piped Natural Gas (PNG) for homes, CNG for transport, and LPG production have been designated as Priority-1. They are guaranteed 100% of their average consumption.
   b. **Industrial Curtailment:** To protect kitchens and transport, gas is being diverted from petrochemical plants and refineries. Fertilizer plants (Priority-2) are capped at 70% supply, while other manufacturing units are receiving only 80%.

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c. **LPG Panic Control:** A mandatory 25-day inter-booking period has been enforced for domestic LPG cylinders to prevent hoarding and stabilize erratic booking patterns.

2. **Diversification of Supply:**

   a. **Alternative Sourcing:** State-owned oil companies have signed emergency deals with Algeria, Norway, Canada, and Australia to bring in LNG and LPG shipments via the Cape of Good Hope or other non-disrupted routes.

   b. **Russia Oil:** India has further increased procurement of Russian oil to compensate for consignments stuck in West Asia, utilizing a reported 30-day waiver from Western sanctions.

3. **Boosting Domestic Production:** The government has directed oil refineries to maximize the production of LPG. This has led to an approximate 10% increase in domestic LPG production in a short period. The additional output is specifically being channeled to households.

What can be the way forward?

1. **Boosting Domestic Fossil Fuel Production:**

   ○ **Mission Samudra Manthan:** This national deepwater exploration mission is a cornerstone of the new strategy. By increasing exploratory drilling from about 30 wells to at least 100 wells per year starting in 2026-27, the government aims to unlock the potential of India's underexplored offshore basins. The goal is to significantly boost domestic crude oil and natural gas production over the next two decades, reducing the need for costly imports.

   ○ **Expanding Strategic Reserves:** The current strategic petroleum reserves provide about 10 days of import cover. The plan is to add another 6 million metric tonnes (MMT) to push the total buffer closer to a 90-day reserve. This will be complemented by a new 10-day strategic gas buffer, providing a crucial cushion against sudden supply shocks like the one triggered by the West Asia conflict.

2. **Massive Investment in Energy Storage:** To address the intermittency of solar and wind, India is planning a massive scale-up of energy storage. The target is to procure around 411 GWh of storage (a mix of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and Pumped Storage Hydro) by 2030 to support its 500 GW renewable target.

3. **Accelerating the National Green Hydrogen Mission (NGHM):** Hydrogen is being positioned as the "fuel of the future" to decouple Indian industry from imported natural gas. The mission aims to produce 5 million metric tonnes (MMT) of Green Hydrogen annually by 2030, specifically targeting the fertilizer and steel sectors which currently rely on 80% imported gas.

4. **Diversifying the Energy Sources & Mix:**

   ○ India should reduce dependence on any single source or supplier by promoting alternative fuels and increasing sourcing from various global regions (e.g., Russia, Africa, U.S., Latin America).

   ○ India should continue to explore underutilized energy sources such as tidal, geothermal, and hydrogen fuel, which can provide sustainable alternatives. Expanding research and development in these areas can unlock new opportunities for energy security.

   ○ Expand nuclear energy capacity, leveraging India's thorium reserves for long-term energy security.

   ○ Promote small modular reactors (SMRs) as a future low-carbon baseload option.

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5. **Focus on Energy Efficiency and Conservation:** Adopting energy-efficient technologies and practices across industries, buildings, and transportation can significantly reduce energy demand. Policies promoting energy conservation, retrofitting, and smart grids can optimize energy use and lower dependency on imports.

> **Read More:** [Indian Express](#)
> **UPSC GS-3:** Energy

The Debate on Euthanasia – Explained Pointwise

The Supreme Court of India has recently permitted the withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment for a 32-year old Harish Rana, who has been in a vegetative state since 2013. This is the first ever Indian court order approving passive euthanasia.

What is Euthanasia?

- Euthanasia, often referred to as "mercy killing," is the practice of intentionally ending a person's life to relieve pain and suffering, typically in the case of a terminal illness or an incurable, distressing condition.
- The term is derived from the Greek words *eu* (good) and *thanatos* (death), literally meaning a "good death."
- Based on the method used – euthanasia can be of 2 types:

Active Euthanasia	Passive Euthanasia
This involves taking a direct action to cause the patient's death. A doctor or another person does something specific, such as administering a lethal injection of drugs.	This involves allowing a person to die by withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining treatments. Examples include: • Turning off a ventilator (life support). • Not performing life-saving surgery.

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	• **Stopping or not starting feeding tubes or hydration.** • **Withholding medications that are necessary to prolong life.**
Active Euthanasia is Illegal: Administering a substance to cause death remains a criminal offense in India.	**Passive Euthanasia is Legal: The Supreme Court of India legalized passive euthanasia under "exceptional circumstances," recognizing the "Right to Die with Dignity" as part of the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution.**

Understanding Key Terms:

- **Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS):** PAS, sometimes called as aid-in-dying, is a semi-passive method of euthanasia in which a medical practitioner prescribes or introduces the appropriate amount of lethal dose to end life at the patient's request.
- **Permanent Vegetative State (PVS):** It is a state in which a patient is unable to sustain himself or herself and requires the assistance of one or more life support systems or even other people to perform basic human functions.
- **Terminal disease:** It refers to a medically confirmed incurable and irreversible sickness or condition that will, within reasonable medical judgement, result in death.
- **Advanced medical directive:** It is also known as a 'living will,' and it is a direction issued by a person who wishes to avoid receiving extraordinary medical care if he or she is diagnosed with a fatal illness. To be legal, such a direction must be voluntary, competent, and given in advance.

What is the Status of Euthanasia in India?

- **Active Euthanasia (Illegal):** Taking a direct action to end a life remains a criminal offense under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, and can be classified as culpable homicide or murder. **Passive Euthanasia (Legal):** The withdrawal or withholding of life-sustaining treatment for terminally ill patients or those in a Persistent Vegetative State (PVS) is legal. This is recognized as a fundamental right under Article 21 (Right to Die with Dignity).
- **Procedural Framework:**
  1. **Primary Medical Board:** A board of at least three doctors at the treating hospital must certify that the patient has no hope of recovery.
  2. **Secondary Medical Board:** A second board, including an external expert nominee, must concur with the primary board's findings.
  3. **Judicial Oversight:** The hospital must intimate a Judicial Magistrate (First Class) of the decision.

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4. **Living Wills:** Individuals can now pre-register an Advance Medical Directive (Living Will) via a notary or gazetted officer, which is stored in digital health records (ABHA). This document instructs doctors on when to stop treatment if the person becomes incompetent.

What is the Judicial View regarding Euthanasia?

P. Rathinam v. Union of India (1994)	The Supreme Court ruled that Section 309 (Attempt to Suicide) of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 is violative of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. The Court stated that Section 309 of the Penal Code should be repealed in order to make our penal rules more humane.
Gian Kaur v. The State of Punjab (1996)	Article 21, which deals with the 'right to life,' was deemed to exclude the 'right to die.' The constitutionality of Sections 306 (Abetment to Suicide) and 309 of the 1860 Code was confirmed.
Aruna Ramchandra Shanbaug v. Union of India (2011)	It was recognized that the patient (Aruna Shanbaug) was no longer a living person and her life was devoid of any human element. The Supreme Court directed a team of three doctors to submit a report to them after assessing the mental and physical conditions of the patient. Accordingly, passive euthanasia was permitted for the first time in the history of India. The Supreme Court also laid down the guidelines for the grant of permission for passive euthanasia.
Common Cause v. Union of India (2018)	The Supreme Court ruled that under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, an individual has the right to die with dignity as part of his or her right to life and personal liberty. An adult of competent mental capacity is entitled to make an informed decision and has a right to refuse medical treatment including withdrawal from life-saving devices. As a result of this judgement, life-support systems for the terminally ill or those in incurable comas can be removed. The Court also recognised the importance of writing a living will (Advanced Medical Directive) and allowed people to opt out of artificial life support.
Chandrakant Narayanrao Tandale v. State of Maharashtra (2020)	Active euthanasia is a form of euthanasia that is illegal. The Court expressed sympathy towards the petitioner in this case but his petition of active euthanasia was not allowed.

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Harish Rana Case (2026)	The Supreme Court bench passed the first judicial order specifically allowing the withdrawal of life support under the guidelines established in the *Common Cause* (2018) judgment.

The Court ruled that Clinically Administered Nutrition and Hydration (CANH)—the feeding tubes keeping him alive—constitutes "medical treatment" rather than basic care. Therefore, it can be legally withdrawn if it serves no therapeutic purpose and only prolongs biological existence without hope of recovery. |

What are the arguments in favour of Euthanasia?

1. **Right to Self-Determination (Autonomy):**
   ○ Individuals should have the fundamental right to decide what happens to their own bodies.
   ○ A person facing terminal illness or unbearable suffering should be free to choose the manner and timing of their death.
   ○ Denying this choice is seen as a violation of personal liberty and human dignity.
   ○ Just as people have the right to refuse medical treatment, they should have the right to end their life on their own terms.

2. **Relief from Unbearable Suffering:**
   ○ For patients suffering from terminal illnesses with no hope of recovery, life can become an unrelenting experience of pain, indignity, and distress.
   ○ Euthanasia offers a compassionate way to end suffering that cannot be adequately controlled even with palliative care.
   ○ Prolonging life artificially in such cases may only extend agony rather than provide meaningful existence.

3. **Human Dignity:**
   ○ Every person deserves to die with dignity, rather than in a state of complete dependence, pain, or loss of bodily functions.
   ○ Euthanasia allows individuals to end their lives while they still retain a sense of self and personal identity.
   ○ A dignified death is considered by many as the final expression of a life lived with self-respect.

4. **Compassion and Mercy:**
   ○ Allowing a loved one or patient to suffer needlessly when a painless death is possible is seen by many as cruel and uncompassionate.
   ○ Euthanasia, from the Greek meaning "good death," is fundamentally rooted in the idea of showing mercy.
   ○ Doctors and caregivers who support euthanasia argue that true compassion sometimes means helping end suffering, not merely prolonging biological life.

5. **Reducing the Burden on Families:**
   ○ Terminal illness can place enormous emotional, physical, and financial strain on families and caregivers.
   ○ Prolonged end-of-life care can lead to "catastrophic healthcare spending," often pushing families into deep poverty for treatment that offers no hope of a cure.

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- ○ Euthanasia can spare families the prolonged anguish of anticipatory grief and caregiving exhaustion.

6. **Overburdened Healthcare Systems:**
   - ○ In countries with strained public healthcare resources like India, keeping terminally ill patients on life support indefinitely consumes enormous resources that could benefit others.
   - ○ Voluntary euthanasia could, in some cases, free up resources for patients who genuinely want and can benefit from continued care.

7. **Precedent from Countries Where It Works:**
   - ○ The Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Switzerland, and several other countries have legalized forms of euthanasia or assisted dying with strict regulatory frameworks.
   - ○ Evidence from these countries suggests that with proper safeguards — multiple doctor approvals, psychological evaluation, waiting periods — abuse can be minimized.
   - ○ These systems demonstrate that euthanasia can be administered responsibly within a well-designed legal and medical framework.

What are the arguments against Euthanasia?

1. **Sanctity of Life:**
   - ○ Most religious and many secular traditions hold that human life is sacred and inherently valuable, regardless of its quality or condition.
   - ○ Life is considered a gift — from God in religious traditions, or as an intrinsic good in secular philosophy — that should not be deliberately ended.
   - ○ Deliberately taking a human life, even with consent, is seen as a fundamental violation of the sanctity of human existence.

2. **The Slippery Slope Danger:**
   - ○ One of the most powerful arguments against euthanasia is the fear of a slippery slope — that once legalized for extreme cases, it will gradually expand to cover broader and more questionable situations.
   - ○ Evidence from Belgium and the Netherlands shows that euthanasia has progressively extended to psychiatric patients, elderly people tired of life, and even children — far beyond the original terminal illness framework.
   - ○ What begins as a safeguarded exception can, over time, become routine practice, eroding the moral boundaries protecting vulnerable lives.
   - ○ Once society accepts intentional killing as a solution to suffering, the threshold for what constitutes "unbearable suffering" may keep lowering.

3. **Risk of Abuse and Coercion:**
   - ○ Vulnerable patients — the elderly, disabled, mentally ill, or economically disadvantaged — may feel subtle or overt pressure to choose death.
   - ○ Family members burdened by caregiving responsibilities, or motivated by inheritance, could consciously or unconsciously influence a patient's decision.
   - ○ In healthcare systems under financial strain, patients may feel they are a burden and choose euthanasia not out of genuine desire but out of guilt.
   - ○ Truly voluntary, fully informed, and completely free consent is extremely difficult to verify, making the system inherently susceptible to exploitation.

4. **Medical Ethics and the Hippocratic Tradition:**

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- ○ The foundational principle of medical ethics is "do no harm" — and deliberately ending a patient's life directly contradicts this principle.
- ○ The Hippocratic Oath, followed for centuries, explicitly prohibits physicians from administering lethal substances.
- ○ Allowing doctors to kill patients fundamentally alters the nature of the doctor-patient relationship, potentially eroding trust.
- ○ Patients, especially vulnerable ones, may fear seeking medical care if they believe doctors have the power and willingness to end their lives.

5. **Palliative Care as a Better Alternative:**
   - ○ Opponents argue that the solution to suffering is not death, but better palliative and hospice care.
   - ○ Modern pain management, psychological support, and holistic end-of-life care can effectively address most forms of physical and emotional suffering.
   - ○ Many calls for euthanasia arise not from irreversible suffering but from inadequate access to quality palliative care.
   - ○ Instead of investing in euthanasia frameworks, societies should invest in expanding and improving end-of-life care for all patients.

6. **Devaluation of Disabled and Elderly Lives:**
   - ○ Permitting euthanasia sends a harmful societal message — that some lives are not worth living, particularly those of the disabled, chronically ill, or elderly.
   - ○ This can reinforce existing prejudices and stigmas against people with disabilities or degenerative conditions.
   - ○ Disabled rights advocates strongly oppose euthanasia, arguing that the desire to die among disabled people often stems from social isolation, inadequate support, and discrimination — not the disability itself.
   - ○ A just society should respond to suffering by improving support systems, not by facilitating death.

7. **Religious and Moral Objections:**
   - ○ Major world religions — Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and Buddhism — broadly oppose euthanasia on moral and theological grounds.
   - ○ Suffering, in many religious traditions, is viewed as having spiritual meaning and value — as an opportunity for growth, redemption, or karmic resolution.
   - ○ Taking one's life or assisting in doing so is considered a sin or moral transgression in most faith traditions.
   - ○ In pluralistic societies, laws must take into account the deeply held moral convictions of large sections of the population.

8. **Legal and Safeguard Failures:**
   - ○ No matter how carefully crafted, legal safeguards around euthanasia are difficult to enforce in practice.
   - ○ Determining whether consent is truly voluntary, whether suffering is truly unbearable, and whether all alternatives have been exhausted involves inherently subjective judgments.
   - ○ Regulatory oversight of euthanasia cases in countries where it is legal has repeatedly been found to be inconsistent and inadequate.
   - ○ The irreversible nature of euthanasia means that any failure in the system results in the unjustifiable taking of a human life.

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9. **Societal and Cultural Shift:**
   ○ **Widespread acceptance of euthanasia risks normalizing death as a solution to difficulty, suffering, or social burden.**
   ○ **It could gradually shift cultural attitudes toward life — particularly vulnerable life — in dangerous directions.**
   ○ **A society that embraces euthanasia may become less motivated to invest in care, research, and support systems for its most vulnerable members.**
   ○ **Opponents argue that true civilizational progress lies in how well we care for the suffering, not in how efficiently we end their lives.**

Read More: Indian Express
UPSC GS-2: Polity

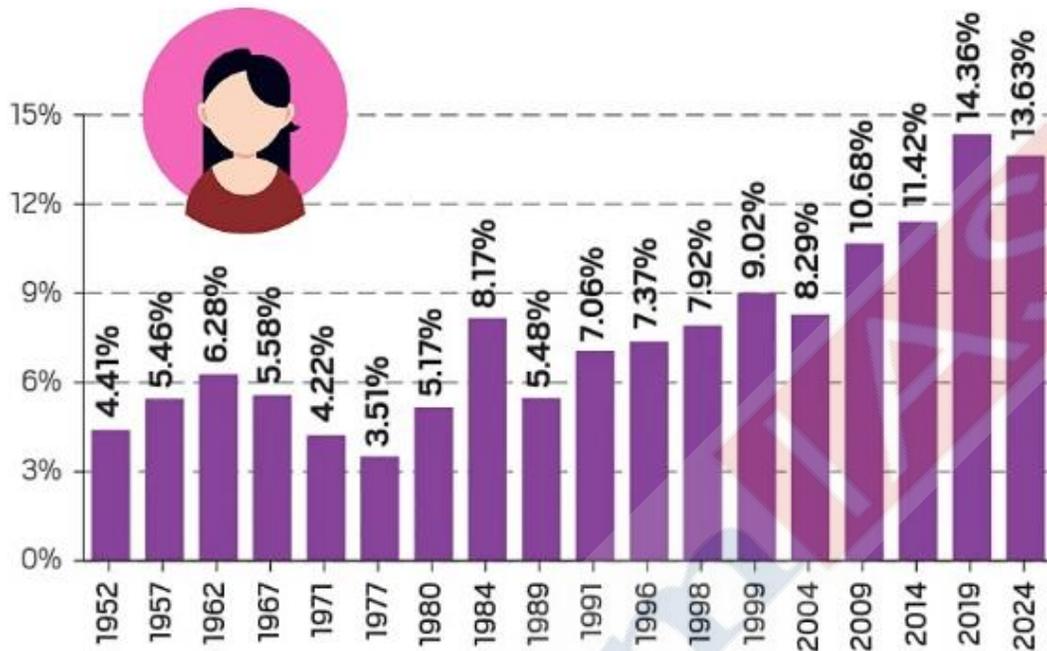## Political Empowerment of Women- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise

Today Indian women have moved beyond mere symbolic roles to become powerful influences in shaping electoral results. This has been possible with the support of women-centered policies like **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana**, **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**, and **Jan Dhan Yojana** empowering them as decision-makers and changemakers.
While the turnout of women voters has increased over the years, campaign participation still shows a clear gender gap. The disparity in Parliamentary representation also remains wide, reflecting limited candidature, party nominations, and constraints on political autonomy.
In this article we will look at the political empowerment journey of women in India.

What has been the status of political representation of Women in India?

1. **Representation of Women in Parliament over the Years:**
   a. **Women made up just 4.41% of the strength of the Lower House in 1952. The number increased to more than 6% in the Lok Sabha held a decade later.**
   b. **However, the number dipped to below 4% in 1971, ironically, with Indira Gandhi, India's first and only woman Prime Minister, at the helm.**
   c. **There has been a slow, but steady rise in women's representation (with a few exceptions). The women representation crossed the 10% mark in 2009 and peaked at 14.36% in 2019.**
   d. **Of the 74 women MPs elected in 2024, 43 are first time MPs. Women MPs have an average age of 50 years and are younger as compared to the overall age of the House, which is 56 years. These women MPs are as educated as their male counterparts, with 78% completing under graduation.**

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CHANGE IN WOMEN'S STRENGTH IN LOK SABHA OVER THE YEARS

Women in Lok Sabha 2024. (Data via PRS Legislative Research)

Source- The Indian Express

2. State Legislative assembly representation: The representation of women in State Legislative Assemblies has been low. The highest is in Chhattisgarh (14.4%) followed by West Bengal (13.7%) and Jharkhand (12.4%).

Source: PIB   Created by | ForumIAS©
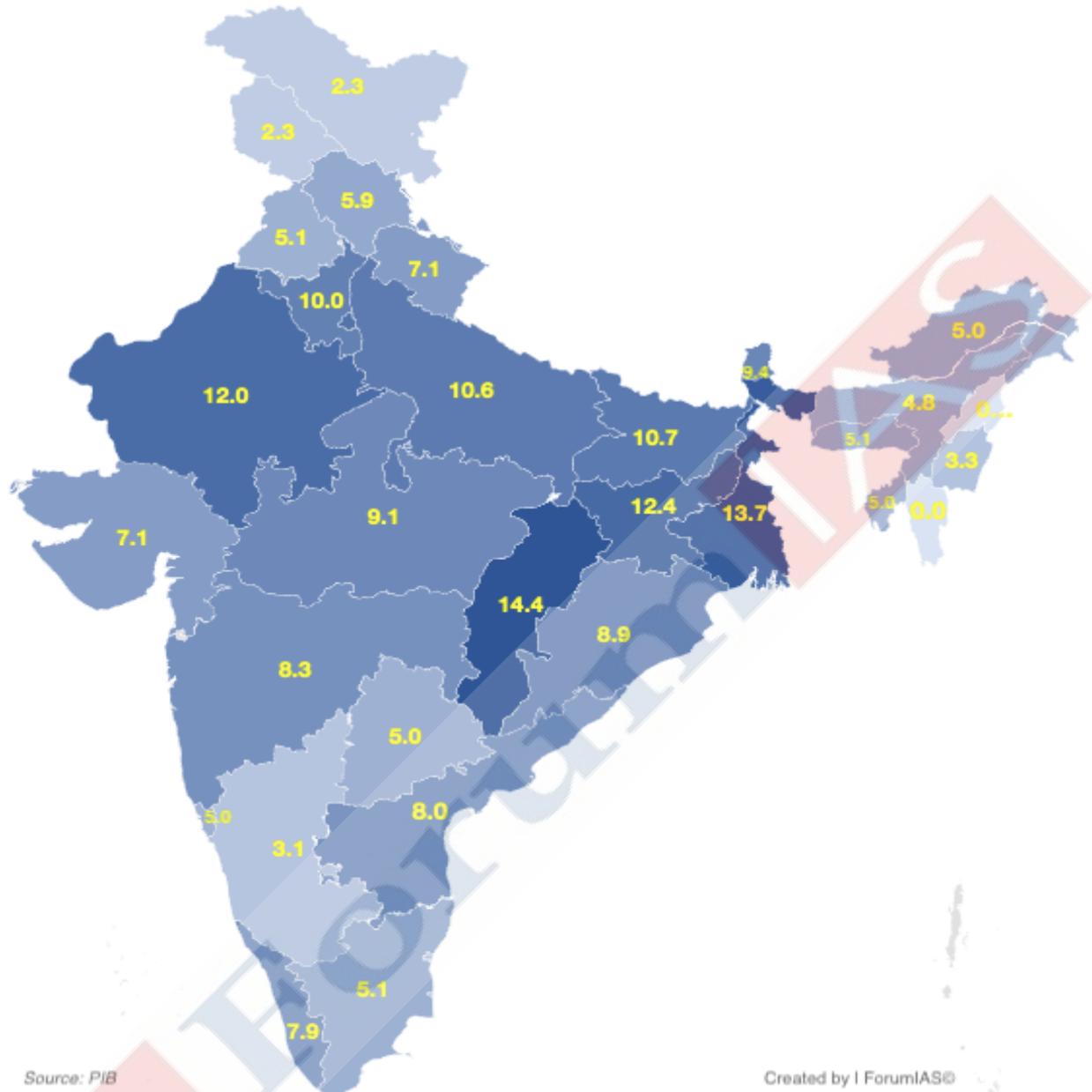
Source- PIB. Percentage of Women Representatives in State Legislative Assemblies as on December 31, 2021. The proportion for Jammu and Kashmir/Ladakh is based on last elections held in 2014.

3. Comparison with Global Standards:

- According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 'Women in Parliament' Report (2021), the global percentage of women in parliament was 26.1%.
- India ranks lower than 140 other nations in terms of the number of women serving in their national legislatures.
- Even though the representation of women in Lok Sabha has increased post independence (~16% in 17th Lok Sabha), India is behind a number of countries of Africa and South Asia (like Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka).

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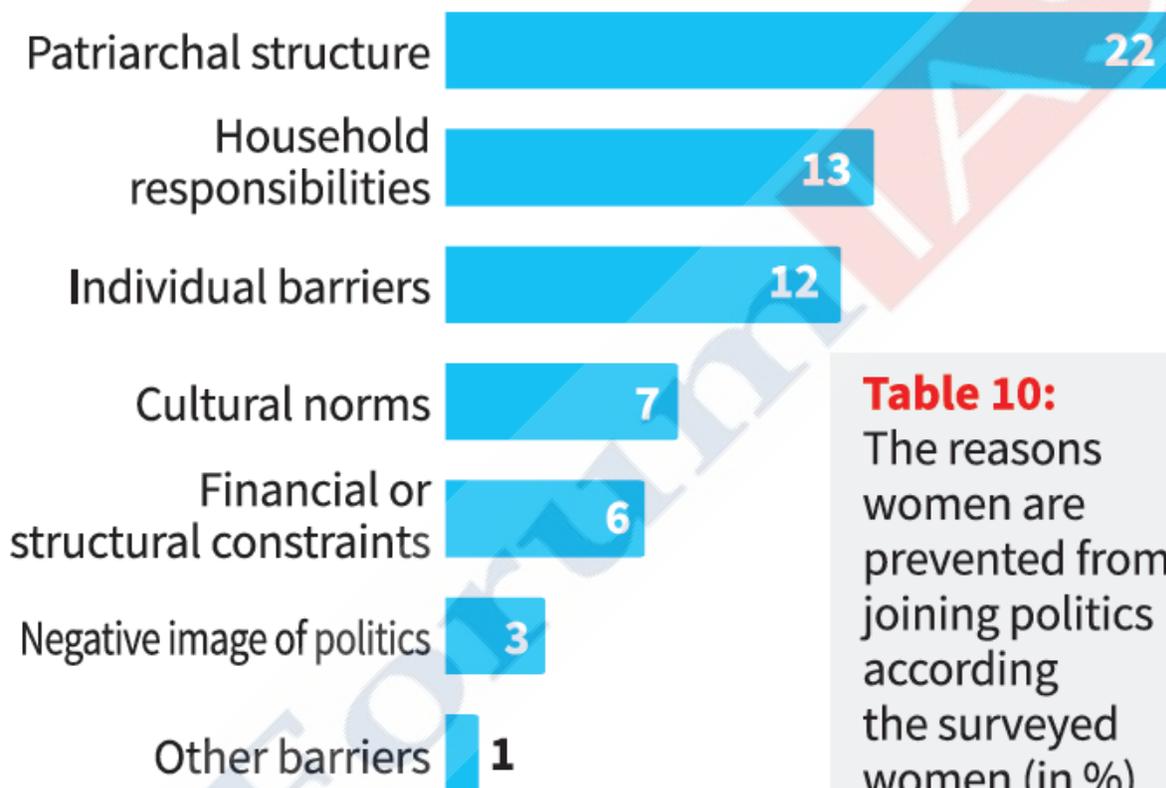
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Why is there a need for greater political empowerment of Women in India?

1. **Accountability and Gender-sensitive Governance-** Political empowerment of women facilitates **direct engagement in public decision-making** and is a means of **ensuring better accountability to women**. It helps in **undertaking reforms** that can help make **all elected officials more effective at promoting gender equality in public policy** and ensuring their implementation.

2. **Breaking the Patriarchal mould of Indian Politics-** Indian Politics has been patriarchal with top party positions and positions of power have been occupied by male. Increase in women representation in parliament, **dismantles the patriarchal nature** of Indian politics.

3. **Focus on Gender Issues-** According to UN Women, higher numbers of women in parliament generally contribute to stronger attention to women's issues. This ensures appropriate policy response to **address gender issues** and **introduce women-sensitive measures**.

4. **Gender Equality-** Women's political participation is a **fundamental prerequisite** for gender equality and genuine democracy. It helps **establish public enquiries on women's issues** and use findings to place issues on **government agendas** and **within legislative programmes**.

5. **Change of Stereotypes-** Enhanced representation helps in cooperation with the women's movement and the media to **change the stereotyped image of women** as only '**homemakers**', to change it to '**lawmakers**'.

6. **Improvement of Economic Performance and Infrastructure-** According to UN University, Women legislators **improve the economic performance of their constituencies 1.8% more than male legislatures**. Evaluation of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana shows the **share of incomplete road projects is 22% lower in female** led constituencies.

What are the reasons behind low political representation of women in India?

1. **Gender Gaps in Political Ambition-** Gender conditioning leads to lack of political ambition in women:

   a. Women are **less encouraged** to run for office/election than men.

   b. Women's **tendency to shy away from competition** also plays a role since the political selection process is likely perceived as highly competitive.

   c. The fear of '**big politics**' and factors such as **self-doubt**, **stereotypes** and **personal reservations** prevent even the most politically gifted women from entering government

   d. Women's **willingness to advance in their political careers** can also be influenced by family and relational considerations. For ex- In Sweden, **female politicians who are promoted to mayor** (i.e. the highest office in municipal politics) **experience a significant increase** in the likelihood of divorcing their partner, whereas this is not the case for men.

2. **Patriarchal Society-** The patriarchal nature of Indian politics also prevents the increase in women participation in India:

   a. **Gender Disparities-** There are still many obstacles in the way of women in positions of leadership due to gender inequality in areas like as **education**, **access to resources**, and **the persistence of biased views**.

   b. **Sexual division of labour-** Women are responsible for the **majority of housework and child care**. This creates hindrance for them to enter politics.

   c. **Cultural and Social Expectations-** Cultural and Social Expectations are **forced upon women** which prevent women from participating in politics.

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3. **Cost of Contesting Election-** Cost of contesting elections is rising with times. **Lack of access to resources and assets** means that women are much less likely to be able to raise the funds for contesting elections than men.

4. **Male politicians as Gate-keepers-** Party leaders generally **prefer to promote male rather than female candidates.** There is a **general bias in the thinking regarding winnability of female candidates** preventing them from selecting women leaders for election.

5. **Growth of criminalisation and corruption-** The exodus of women from politics can also be attributed to a lack of political education coupled with the **growth in criminalization and corruption.**

Reason	Percentage
Patriarchal structure	22
Household responsibilities	13
Individual barriers	12
Cultural norms	7
Financial or structural constraints	6
Negative image of politics	3
Other barriers	1

Table 10: The reasons women are prevented from joining politics according the surveyed women (in %)

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

What measures have been undertaken for political empowerment of Women and increasing their participation?

Legislative Measures	1. [Nari Shakti Vandana Adhiniyam (Women reservation Act)](#)– It has been passed to provide **33% reservation** for **women in the Lok Sabha** and **state legislative assemblies**. 2. 73rd and 74th amendment Act- This amendment Act provided **33% reservation to women in local bodies**. Some states like Bihar have **increased the women reservation in the local bodies to 50%**. 3. Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women- In 1997 (11th Lok Sabha), the **Committee on Empowerment of Women** was formed to advance the position of women 4. Gender-Neutral Rules of Lok Sabha- The rules of the Lok Sabha were made completely gender-neutral in 2014 under the leadership of Meira Kumar. Since then, every document has called the **head of a Lok Sabha Committee** as the **Chairperson**.
Constitutional Measures	1. Article 14- It has established **equality as a fundamental right**. It inevitably necessitates equal opportunity, as stated in Article 15. 2. Article 46- It puts on the state the **responsibility to safeguard vulnerable groups** against social injustice and all forms of exploitation. 3. Article 243D- It ensures participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions by mandating **at least 33% reservation for women** in total seats and the offices of chairpersons of Panchayats. 4. Article 326- Elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States to be on the basis of **adult suffrage**.

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International Covenants	Globally, several international commitments have been made, for achieving gender equality and these have emphasized on enhancing women's representation in political sphere.
	
	1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)- **Upheld women's right** to participate in public life.
	2. Beijing Platform for Action (1995), Millennium Development Goals **(2000) and** Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030)- All these called for removing barriers to equal participation and also took into account **increasing women's representation in parliament** to measure progress towards gender equality.
	
	## Political Participation of Women: International Conventions
	
	- **Basic Human Right**: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) declare **Political Participation as a basic human right**.
	- **Eliminate Discrimination**: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1979.
	  ○ Article 7 calls for the State parties to **take appropriate steps to eliminate discrimination against women** in the political sphere.
	  ○ Women must have equal right to vote and be eligible to hold public office, participate in policy formulation and implementation.
	- **Women Participation**: The 4th World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) considered 'Women in power and decision making' as one of the 12 critical areas in its **Platform of Action**.
	- **30% Representation at Decision Making Level**: The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) endorsed a **30% target of women participation** at decision-making levels (1995).
	
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What Should be the Way Forward?

1. **Checks on the crimininalisation of politics**- We must address the larger issues of electoral reforms such as measures to check **criminalisation of politics** and **influence of black money** to achieve the desired results of women reservation.
2. **Intra party democracy**- Institutionalisation of intra-party democracy will make available a wider pool of women candidates.
3. **Nomination to Rajya Sabha and State Legislative Councils**- Every Political Party must **nominate 33% women** and **67% men** for every election to **Rajya Sabha and State legislative councils** to achieve true women representation.
4. Promotion of women participation at panchayat level through strengthening women self-help groups. This will ensure able women candidates for MP/MLA elections.
5. Strengthening women's agencies and organizations for building a progressive society with equality of opportunities among all citizens.

6. Promotion of girl's participation in College/Universities: Student political parties and political debate to increase their political prowess for future.

7. Reaffirmation to G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration- India must be committed and should reaffirm to the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration which **underscores investment in political empowerment of women and girls** as it has multiplier effects in the implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

8. Gender Sensitisation and Internships- Gender sensitization workshops, internships acclimatizing them with the political process will help in the creation of a healthy culture of gender parity in the political sphere.

Read More: The Hindu
UPSC Syllabus- GS 1 Issues related to women, GS II, Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Custodial Violence in India – Explained Pointwise

6 Police personnel across police stations in Tamil Nadu have been suspended in connection with the custodial death of a 26-year old person named Akash Delison. In a dying declaration recorded by him at hospital a day before his death, he described the severe police torture that he went through.

Custodial Violence in India
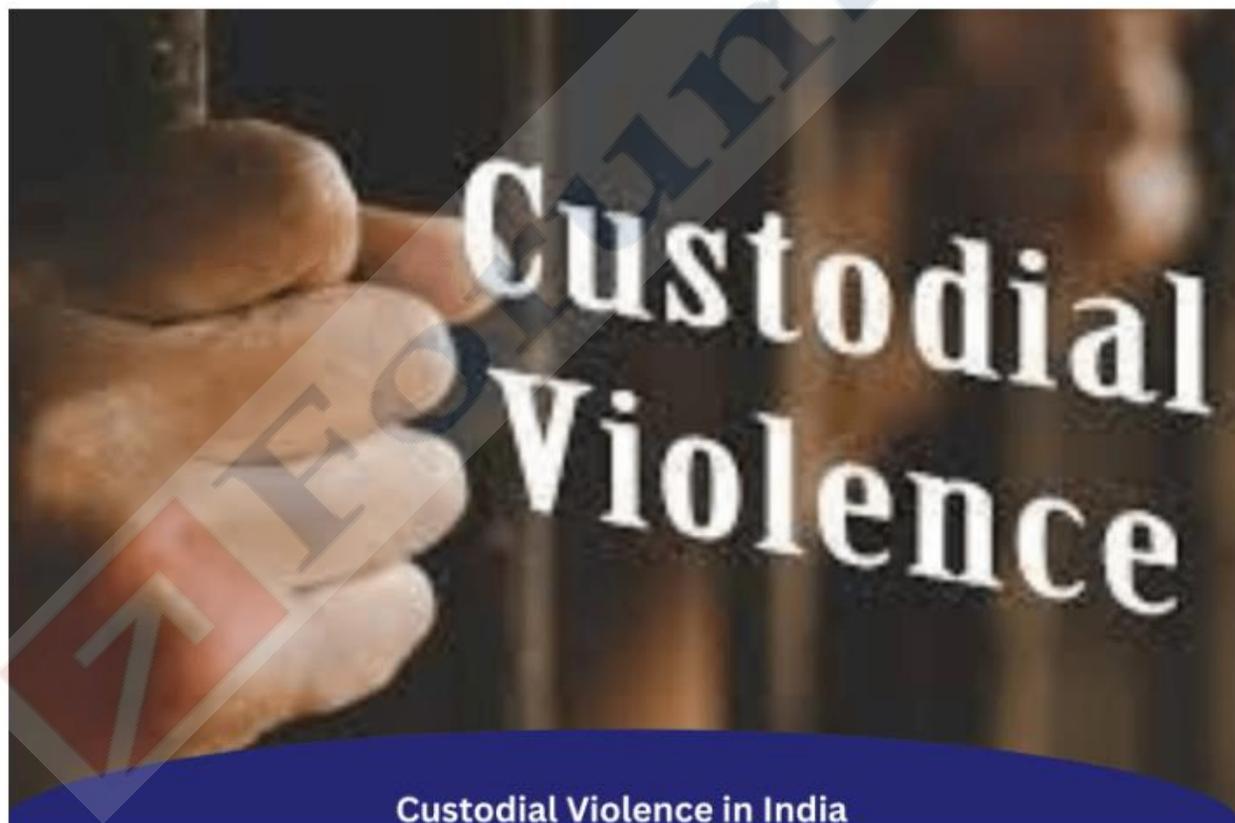
What is Custodial Violence? What are types of Custodial Violence?

- The term custodial violence refers to the inhumane treatment of people by law enforcement while they are in custody. These tactics range from abusing their authority to obtaining information.

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- **Types of Custodial Violence-** Custodial violence can take many different forms, and authorities will employ different tactics depending on the situation and their goals.
  1. **Physical:** This technique is based on utilizing physical force to inflict physical injury and tiredness on the subject, resulting in immense anguish.
  2. **Physiological:** It includes mental torture. For instance, depriving a person of food. It also includes threat and humiliation of the victim
  3. **Sexual:** It is employed through rape/sodomy. It is directed towards the social and psychological harassment of the victims.

What are the provisions to prevent custodial violence?

Constitutional Provisions	1. **Article 21:** Constitution guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, which includes protection from torture and inhuman treatment. 2. **Article 20(3):** Protects individuals from being compelled to be witnesses against themselves, safeguarding them from coercive interrogation. 3. **Article 39A:** Ensures free legal aid to ensure that no citizen is denied justice due to economic or other disabilities. 4. **Article 22:** Provides safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention, including the right to be informed of the grounds of arrest and the right to consult a lawyer.
Legal Provisions	1. **IPC:** Sections 330 (voluntarily causing hurt to extort confession) and 348 (wrongful confinement to extort confession). 2. **CrPC:** Section 176 mandates a judicial inquiry into custodial deaths. 3. **Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993:** The Act established the NHRC and SHRC's to investigate custodial violence and recommend action. 4. **BNS Provisions:** The BNS maintains provisions related to wrongful restraint and illegal detention, which are often precursors to custodial abuse. E.g. Section 176 (causing hurt by public servant), Section 177 (causing grievous hurt by public servant), Section 178 (wrongful confinement by public servant).

What are the Causes of Custodial Violence?

1. **Lack of answerability and Impunity:** A significant cause of custodial violence is the prevailing lack of accountability, where weak oversight mechanisms and a systemic reluctance to prosecute perpetrators create an environment of impunity. E.g. Custodial death of P Jayaraj and Bennicks in Tamil Nadu.
2. **Systemic Law Enforcement Failures:** Systemic issues within law enforcement, including overcrowding, understaffing, insufficient training on human rights, and a hierarchical culture that discourages dissent, contribute directly to the occurrence of custodial violence. E.g. NHRC consistently highlight overcrowding and understaffing in Indian prisons and police lockups.

3. **Societal Influences on Violence:** Societal factors, such as social inequality, a tolerance for violence, and negative media portrayals that reinforce harmful stereotypes, play a crucial role in perpetuating custodial violence. E.g. Caste based discrimination in prisons.

4. **Procedural Gaps and Vulnerabilities:** Procedural deficiencies, including arbitrary arrests, inadequate documentation of detainees, and a lack of access to legal aid, exacerbate the risk of custodial violence.

5. **Work Pressure:** Psychological factors, such as stress, burnout, sadistic tendencies among custodial personnel, can lead to the infliction of violence. E.g. According to the 2019 Status of Policing in India Report (SPIR), police officers work an average of 14 hours a day, with nearly 80% of them putting in more than 8 hours.

6. **No Specific Anti-Torture Law:** India lacks a specific national law criminalizing torture, despite signing the UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) in 1997, and this absence is a significant issue, allowing custodial torture to continue.

7. **Positive Reinforcement of Third-Degree Methods:** The use of third-degree torture to extract information or coerce confessions is often reinforced when it produces results.

What are the Consequences of Custodial Violence?

1. **Severe Human Rights Violations:** Custodial violence inflicts physical and psychological trauma (PTSD), violates dignity and privacy (Article 21), and leads to loss of life, as evidenced by cases like D.K. Basu vs State of West Bengal (1997) and NCRB data.

2. **Erosion of the Rule of Law:** Police impunity, undermining judicial authority, and failure of constitutional safeguards (Articles 21 & 22) perpetuate a culture where accountability is absent. E.g. A report by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) noted that fear of police harassment discourages people from seeking justice, especially among marginalized communities.

3. **Profound Social and Psychological Impact:** Custodial violence destroys public trust, stigmatizes victims, and fuels a cycle of violence, demonstrated by widespread protests like those following the Thoothukudi custodial deaths.

4. **Significant Economic Burden:** Victims lose livelihoods, families bear financial strain from medical and legal costs, and the state incurs compensation expenses, as mandated by cases like Nilabati Behera vs. State of Orissa.

5. **Damaged International Reputation:** India's failure to address custodial violence and ratify UNCAT harms its global standing under international treaties like the UDHR (1948) and the ICCPR (1976), impacting extradition requests and highlighting a violation of international commitments. E.g. Sanjay Bhandari extradition case in the UK highlighted India's custodial torture record, leading to the denial of extradition.

6. **Legal and Institutional Weaknesses:** Custodial violence contributes to judicial backlogs, erodes the credibility of oversight bodies like the NHRC, and reveals the failure of legislative reforms. E.g. The absence of a comprehensive anti-torture law, despite recommendations from the Law Commission and Rajya Sabha Select Committee.

What are the Challenges in Stopping Custodial Violence?

1. **Legal and Institutional Deficiencies:** The absence of a dedicated anti-torture law, weak enforcement of existing laws (despite recommendations from the Law Commission (273rd Report, 2017) and the Rajya Sabha Select Committee (2010)), judicial delays, and inadequate independent oversight create a system where custodial violence thrives with impunity.

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2. **Police Impunity and Lack of Accountability:** A culture of impunity within police force, coupled with a lack of transparency in custodial procedures and resistance to reforms, allows officers to escape consequences for abusive actions.

3. **Political and Administrative Obstacles:** A lack of political will to enact necessary legislation, political interference in cases of abuse, and bureaucratic inefficiencies hinder efforts to implement reforms and provide justice.

4. **Societal and Cultural Factors:** Public apathy, stigmatization of victims, and a normalization of violence contribute to a climate where custodial violence is tolerated and perpetuated.

5. **Economic and Resource Limitations:** Inadequate funding for police reforms, delays in compensation for victims, and resource constraints within police department impede the implementation of effective measures to prevent custodial violence.

6. **International and Diplomatic Ramifications:** India's failure to ratify UNCAT, the impact on extradition requests, and diplomatic repercussions damage its global reputation and undermine its international commitments to human rights.

What should be the way forward?

1. **Enactment of a Standalone Anti-Torture Law:** India must criminalize custodial torture through a dedicated Prevention of Torture Bill, as recommended by the Law Commission of India (2017). This law should align with the UNCAT, prescribing stringent punishments for erring officials and ensuring mandatory compensation for victims.

2. **Strengthening Judicial Oversight:** Custodial deaths and torture cases must be investigated by Judicial Magistrates instead of Executive Magistrates, ensuring unbiased scrutiny, as per the 2024 Supreme Court ruling. Courts should also impose harsher penalties for violations of D.K. Basu guidelines and mandate compliance with human rights norms.

3. **Independent Oversight Mechanisms:** Establishing independent oversight bodies at state and national levels, as suggested by the Justice J.S. Verma Committee (2013), can ensure impartial investigations into custodial violence cases. The NHRC must be given prosecutorial powers to act against offenders rather than merely recommending action.

4. **Police Reforms for Transparency and Accountability:** Full implementation of the Prakash Singh case (2006) police reforms, which advocate separating law enforcement from political influence, can professionalize policing and reduce misuse of power. Additionally, Model Police Act, 2006 must be enforced uniformly across states to promote accountability.

5. **Mandatory CCTV Surveillance and Audio-Video Interrogation:** Expanding the Supreme Court's directive on CCTV installation in police stations (Common Cause vs Union of India, 2018) to include real-time monitoring and external audits can prevent custodial torture. Video recordings of interrogations, as recommended by NHRC, must be made mandatory.

6. **Fast-Track Courts and Compensation Mechanisms:** Special fast-track courts should be established to expedite custodial violence cases, ensuring strict punishment for perpetrators. Additionally, NHRC's recommendation for uniform compensation for victims must be institutionalized, with a clear fund allocation mechanism.

7. **Ratification of International Conventions and Global Best Practices:** India must ratify the UNCAT and adopt best practices from countries like the UK's Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) and Norway's Ombudsman Model, which allow for independent oversight and strict accountability of law enforcement officials.

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Conclusion: Custodial violence remains a grave violation of human rights and a stain on India's justice system. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive reforms, including the enactment of an anti-torture law, police reforms, and ratification of UNCAT. By implementing these measures, India can uphold its constitutional values and international commitments, ensuring justice and dignity for all citizens.

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US- Iran Conflict- Explained Pointwise

Following recent developments after Operation Epic Fury, the long-running shadow confrontation between the United States and Iran, often involving Israel, has escalated into a direct and high-intensity conflict. This escalation has significantly destabilized the security architecture of West Asia, culminating in the closure of the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz and triggering a major global energy shock. India, an importer of energy resources sourcing out of the region, has also been badly impacted as the key sea lanes in the region are disrupted.

Historical Evolution of the US-Israel-Iran Conflict

The current escalation is the result of a decades-long transition from strategic alliance to an existential "shadow war," and finally, to the direct military confrontation of 2026.

The Era of Strategic Alignment (Pre-1979)	The "Peripheral Doctrine"- Under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Iran maintained a cordial, non-formal alliance with Israel to counter Arab nationalism and Soviet expansion.
	Pillar of US Policy- Iran served as a key regional partner for the United States, acting as a bulwark against communism during the Cold War.
	Security Cooperation- The three nations shared intelligence and economic interests, creating a stable, pro-Western security architecture in West Asia.
The 1979 Revolutionary Watershed	Ideological Shift- The Islamic Revolution replaced the monarchy with a high-clerical leadership that viewed the US as the "Great Satan" and Israel as an "illegitimate entity."
	Institutionalized Hostility- The 1979 US Embassy Hostage Crisis led to the permanent severance of diplomatic ties between Washington and Tehran.
	Rejection of Western Influence- Iran's new foreign policy centered on "Exporting the Revolution" and resisting Western interference in Islamic lands.

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Rise of the "Axis of Resistance" (1980s–2010s)	**Proxy Warfare:** Iran cultivated a network of non-state actors like Hezbollah (Lebanon), Hamas (Gaza), and various Shia militias (Iraq/Syria), to extend its strategic depth. **Asymmetric Deterrence:** These groups allowed Iran to strike Israeli and US interests without engaging in a direct conventional war. **Israel's Counter-Doctrine:** Israel responded with "The War Between Wars," using covert sabotage, cyber warfare (Stuxnet), and targeted assassinations of nuclear scientists to degrade Iranian capabilities.
The Nuclear Friction & JCPOA Collapse	**Existential Threat:** Israel and the US viewed Iran's uranium enrichment as a pursuit of nuclear weapons, which they deemed an unacceptable "red line." **The JCPOA Cycle:** The 2015 Nuclear Deal provided temporary limits on Iran's program, but the 2018 US withdrawal and the subsequent "Maximum Pressure" campaign led Iran to accelerate enrichment beyond permissible levels. **Breakout Proximity:** By late 2025, intelligence indicated Iran was weeks away from "nuclear breakout," triggering the shift from diplomacy to military planning.
Transition to Direct Confrontation (2024–2026)	**End of the Shadow War:** The October 2023 Israel-Hamas conflict acted as a catalyst, dragging Iran and Israel into unprecedented direct missile exchanges in 2024 and 2025. **Operation Epic Fury (2026):** Citing imminent nuclear weaponization, a joint US-Israeli strike targeted Iran's supreme leadership and 500+ strategic sites on February 28, 2026. **Total Escalation:** The death of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the subsequent closure of the Strait of Hormuz transformed a regional rivalry into a global security and energy crisis.

Current Ramifications of the US-Iran Conflict

The escalation following 'Operation Epic Fury' has transitioned from a regional skirmish into a systemic global crisis.

1. On the United States: Domestic and Strategic Pressure

- **Economic "Stagflation" Risk:** Despite being a net energy exporter, US domestic gasoline prices have surged to over $3.50/gallon due to global market linkage. This has fueled inflation and dampened consumer confidence.

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- **Political Volatility:** The conflict has become a central theme in the 2026 domestic discourse, with the US facing pressure to justify the "decapitation strike" (targeting Khamenei) as costs mount.
- **Military Overstretch:** The deployment of additional Marines and carrier groups to the Middle East has diverted strategic focus from the Indo-Pacific, potentially creating a "security vacuum" that adversaries may exploit.
- **The Naval Dilemma:** Washington is struggling to form a "Coalition of the Willing" to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, as many allies fear the high insurance and physical risks to their warships.

2. On GCC Countries: The "Second-Order Coercion"

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are facing an existential crisis, bearing the brunt of a war they did not initiate.

- **Targeting of Neutrals:** Iran has adopted a policy of "Second-Order Coercion," launching retaliatory drone and missile strikes on infrastructure in the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain to force these states to pressure the US for a ceasefire.
- **Aviation & Tourism Collapse:** Airspace closures have grounded over 30,000 flights.
- Hubs like Dubai (DXB) have sustained physical damage, paralyzing the region's tourism-led economic model.
- **Energy Freeze:** Qatar has declared *force majeure* on LNG exports after strikes on its Ras Laffan facility.
- GCC oil production has dropped by an estimated 10 million barrels per day.
- **Fiscal Strain:** Disrupted export revenues are forcing states to dip into Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWFs), risking global financial disinvestment.

3. On West Asia: Regional Fragmentation

- **The "2026 Lebanon War":** The conflict has spilled over into a full-scale Israeli ground invasion of Southern Lebanon to neutralize Hezbollah's missile threat.
- **Humanitarian Disaster:** Over 2,000 casualties were reported in the first two weeks alone, with hundreds of thousands displaced across Lebanon, Iran, and Iraq.
- **Regime Instability:** The reported death of the Supreme Leader has triggered internal power struggles in Tehran between hardline IRGC factions and reformists, leading to "Strategic Fragmentation."
- **End of Rapprochement:** The fragile 2023-24 diplomatic thaw (e.g., Saudi-Iran normalization) has completely collapsed, replaced by a rigid "Axis vs. Coalition" binary.

Feature	Impact Details
Global Energy	Brent Crude at $110–$120/barrel; Strait of Hormuz effectively closed.

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Global Trade	Helium (Qatar) and Fertilizer (GCC) supply chains broken, hitting semiconductor and agri-sectors.
Security	Transition from proxy "Shadow War" to direct, high-intensity state-on-state warfare.
Diplomacy	Total failure of "rules-based" international mediation; rise of unilateral "pre-emptive" strikes.

Impact on India & the World Order

The 2026 US-Iran war has moved beyond a regional crisis, becoming a "systemic shock" to the global economy and India's domestic stability.

1. **Impact on India: The "Triple Vulnerability"**
- **Energy Security & Cooking Gas Crisis**
  - **LPG Dependence: India imports 91% of its LPG and 88% of its oil from the Gulf.**
    - **The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has paralyzed these supplies.**
  - **Domestic Rationing: The government has invoked the Essential Commodities Act, increasing the LPG refill waiting period to 25 days and raising prices by ₹60/cylinder.**
  - **Priority Allocation: Natural gas is being diverted to "Tier 1" needs (households/transport), hitting fertilizer plants and MSMEs (e.g., the Morbi tile industry).**
- **Economic & Inflationary Strain**
  - **The "$120 Barrel": Every $1 increase in crude adds $2 billion to India's annual import bill.**
    - **Prolonged triple-digit prices are widening the Current Account Deficit (CAD).**
  - **Trade Disruptions: Over 400,000 tonnes of Basmati rice and other exports are stranded.**
    - **Shipping insurance premiums have surged, making Indian exports uncompetitive.**
- **Humanitarian & Diaspora Concerns**
  - **Seafarers at Risk: Nearly 20,000 Indian seafarers and 38 Indian-flagged vessels are stranded in the Persian Gulf conflict zone.**
  - **Strategic Reprioritization: India has accepted a 30-day US waiver to purchase Russian oil stranded at sea to stabilize the domestic market.**
2. **Impact on World Order: "Geopolitical Fragmentation"**
- **Collapse of the Rules-Based Order: The use of massive pre-emptive strikes (Operation Epic Fury) and the targeting of sovereign leadership has bypassed the UN framework, signaling a shift toward unilateralism.**
- **Weaponization of Global Chokepoints:**
  - **The dual-closure of the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb (via Houthi attacks) has frozen 20% of global oil flows, proving that regional actors can trigger a global recession.**

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- Rise of "Cold War 2.0"
    - Strategic Realignment: The crisis is pushing GCC nations closer to the Western security umbrella while forcing countries like India to deepen ties with the US for maritime security.
    - Emergence of Technology Rivalry: Experts suggest the "New Order" will be defined not just by oil, but by control over AI, critical minerals, and supply chain resilience.
- Accelerated De-dollarization: As the West imposes heavy sanctions on Iran, rival blocs (Russia/China) are accelerating the use of non-dollar currencies for energy trade to bypass the US-led financial system.

Way Forward

- Emergency Strategic Reserves: Immediate filling of Phase-II Strategic Petroleum Reserves and the creation of dedicated LPG buffers to insulate households from Gulf shocks.
- "Convoy" Diplomacy: The Indian Navy should lead a "Maritime Protection Group" for Indian-flagged tankers, maintaining strategic autonomy while ensuring energy flow.
- Regional Reconstruction: Support the transition in Tehran toward a stable, non-adversarial leadership to prevent the emergence of a "failed state" in West Asia.
- Secure Maritime Corridors: India must lead a "Maritime Protection Group" (independent of the US-led coalition) to provide armed escorts for Indian-flagged tankers.
- Active Neutrality: India must utilize the Oman/Qatar channels to negotiate "Safe Passage Agreements" for civilian vessels, positioning itself as a mediator between the US and the new Iranian leadership.
- IMEC Acceleration: Shifting trade priority to the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) land routes to reduce future reliance on maritime chokepoints.

Conclusion

For India, the path forward lies in transforming this systemic shock into a catalyst for strategic autonomy. By leveraging maritime independence through sovereign naval escorts, securing captive overseas energy assets, and institutionalizing rupee-denominated trade architectures, India can insulate its economy from West Asian volatility. Ultimately, the crisis offers a "strategic window" to lead a post-oil regional order, where security is anchored not by military containment, but by resilient, multi-modal economic corridors like the IMEC.

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