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No. 5, AKS Nagar, Near Gandhi Park, Coimbatore - 641 001

## GS Paper I – History

# ‘Vande Mataram advisory not a threat to conform’

Ministry’s advisory on National Song only prescribes protocol and those who do not sing it will not face any action, says SC; even then, there is burden on those who refuse to sing, argues petitioner

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**

NEW DELHI

**T**he Supreme Court on Wednesday said the January 28 guidelines issued by Union Home Ministry on playing National Song *Vande Mataram* in full at public and ceremonial occasions are not a “threat to conform” and do not fall foul of constitutional freedoms.

“...it is only an advisory... The Ministry feels the National Song is as much an expression of the national identity. You may have a different point of view. But we feel you have vague apprehensions of discrimination which do not have a clear nexus with the advisory now... But please come immediately to us as and when you feel you have been discriminated against or singled out on the plank of this advisory,” Justice Joymalya Bagchi addressed petitioner Muhammed Sayeed Noori, represented by senior advocate Sanjay Hegde.

Mr. Hegde began his arguments by noting the Ministry’s circular made the singing of the National Song “mandatory” and compelled citizens to participate in a social demonstration of loyalty which



goes against one’s individual conscience. He pointed out that the circular has instructed the three-minute National Song to be played before the 55-second National Anthem, reducing the status of the latter to an “epilogue”.

### Anthem vs. Song

Chief Justice Surya Kant, heading the three-judge Bench, said there was absolutely nothing in the January 28 circular to show that people who did not play or sing the National Song would face penal or adverse action.

“Even if there is no penalty and even if today there is no legal sanction, there is a huge burden on somebody who refuses to sing or stand up,” Mr. Hegde argued.

“What is that burden in

law here? The circular prescribes a protocol of when and how the National Song must be played, what is to be done when it is played, etc. We can understand if somebody sends you a notice saying you did not play or stand up for the National Song and your institution should be closed or derecognised as a result,” the Chief Justice reacted.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta intervened to emphasise that respect for the National Song was organic and, ideally, even an advisory was not necessary. He referred to Article 51A of the Constitution, which made it a fundamental duty to respect the National Flag and National Anthem.

Mr. Hegde said the National Anthem and National Song were distinct from each other. “..It was on Ja-

nuary 24, 1950 that Rajendra Prasad, as President of the Constituent Assembly, ended the controversy by saying *Jana Gana Mana* would be the National Anthem and *Vande Mataram* the National Song. When the Parliament subsequently inserted Article 51A [in the 42nd Constitutional Amendment], it spoke only of the National Anthem,” he explained.

He said India was a country which paid equal respect to all religions and everyone’s individual conscience, even that of an atheist. Mr. Mehta retorted that it was not as if people were being compelled to sing *bhajans*.

Justice Bagchi referred to the circular which said, “In all schools, the day’s work may begin with community singing of the National Song”. “The expression ‘may’ means you could sing as much as not sing. It allows individual conscience to take the decision,” he said.

Mr. Hegde said patriotism cannot be compelled, provoking the Chief Justice to ask if “patriotism cannot be compelled even for the National Anthem”.

The court refused to entertain the petition, terming it “premature”.



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## GS Paper II – International Relations

# Significant rise in China border patrols after Galwan clash: MHA

**Vijaita Singh**

NEW DELHI

Patrolling by the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) along India's border with China increased significantly after 20 soldiers were killed in clashes with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in eastern Ladakh's Galwan valley in June 2020, according to data from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

The MHA's annual report for 2024-25 published on Wednesday stated that 4,503 patrols were conducted from April 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 by the ITBP, the primary border guarding force deployed along the 3,488-km border with China.

On an average, the ITBP

**4,503 patrols were conducted from April 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 by the ITBP, which guards India's border with China**

conducted 500 patrols per month during the nine-month period, it added.

**'Strict vigil'**

**"ITBP ensured security of the border and remained vigilant during heightened security scenarios along the Indo-China border. To keep strict vigil, ITBP conducted 4,503 patrols along the Indo-China border," the report stated.**

According to previous annual reports, 6,561 patrols were conducted bet-

ween January 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024 - a 15-month window averaging about 437 patrols per month - while 2,899 patrols were conducted between April 1, 2022 and December 31, 2022, at an average of 322 per month.

Though the corresponding figures for other years are not available, the numbers reflect a marked rise in border patrols since 2017-18, when only 2,083 patrols were recorded: about 173 per month.

In September 2020, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had informed Parliament that face-offs with the Chinese PLA happened because "patrols were interrupted" and there was no commonly delineated Line of Actual Control.



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## GS Paper II – International Relations

# Iran dismisses U.S. bid to end conflict, sets its own terms

Halting aggression, reparations, and 'sovereignty' over Strait of Hormuz part of Tehran's terms; U.S. offers sanctions relief for reopening the Strait

**Stanly Johnny**

**I**ran on Wednesday dismissed a U.S. proposal to end the war and set out its own terms for peace, even as it continued trading fire with Israel.

The U.S. proposal offered a ceasefire and sanctions relief in return for the Islamic Republic abandoning its nuclear programme and reopening the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran, according to state-run Press TV, has laid down five conditions to end the war, which the U.S. and Israel launched on February 28 with the assassination of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several other leaders. Tehran is seeking: "a complete halt to aggression and assassinations"; "concrete mechanisms" to prevent future attacks; payment of war damages and reparations; an end to fighting on "all fronts"; and recognition of its "exercise of sovereignty" over the Strait of Hormuz, which it calls its "natural and legal right".

"Iran will end the war



**On alert:** Security forces and first responders at a site struck by a projectile on the outskirts of Tel Aviv in Israel during the war. AFP

when it decides to do so and when its own conditions are met," a senior security official said, according to Press TV. The official, who is not named in the report, said Washington has put forward proposals through various diplomatic channels that are "excessive" and "disconnected from reality" on the battlefield.

U.S. President Donald Trump, who had backed off from his threat to attack Iran's power infrastructure claiming that Washington and Tehran were in talks, said on Tuesday that Iran

had given him "a very big present worth a tremendous amount of money", adding that "we are dealing with the right people". "I think we're going to end [the war]." Mr. Trump said without elaborating on the "present".

Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters on Wednesday dismissed reports about talks, adding that the U.S. is calling its "defeat" an agreement.

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## GS Paper II – International Relations

# West Asia conflict: how finding oil changed the Persian Gulf's ecology

The Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz bring oil and war to mind, but until recently the region looked very different; to see how, it is only necessary to look at its shallow waters and precarious coasts, where many fragile ecosystems live amid heat, salinity, ships, and geopolitical tensions

Ipsita Herlekar

**M**ilitary ships and oil tankers dominate how we imagine the Persian Gulf today. Yet beyond this familiar imagery of geopolitics and petroleum lies a mosaic of vulnerable ecosystems.

It wasn't always this way. Just six decades ago, these waters were busy not with warships but fishing boats, and the glittering megacities that now line the coast were then little more than fishing villages.

The Gulf coastline is remarkably young. Formed 3,000 to 6,000 years ago as the sea flooded the Arabian basin through the Strait of Hormuz, it is today a shallow, semi-enclosed sea spanning about 226,000 sq. km, with an average depth of just 30 m.

Its shallowness and limited water exchange with the open waters of the Arabian sea drive its extreme conditions. The summer temperatures regularly exceed 35 °C while the high rate of evaporation keeps the water salty to the tune of 44-70 parts per thousand – almost twice as salty as open sea water. Yet life persists.

### Life on the edge

At the boundary of land and sea lies the intertidal zone – shaped by cycles of exposure and submergence to heat and hypersalinity.

These are dynamic systems where organic matter breaks down and is recycled, helping microorganisms survive in the adjacent waters. Beyond them, lagoons host specialised microbes and commercially important species like shrimp. Mangroves are fish nurseries, migratory bird refuges, and carbon sinks.

The mudflats also sustain shrimp as well as coastal food webs while the offshore seagrass meadows are among the Gulf's most productive ecosystems, proving to be places where fish and pearl oysters spawn.

These meadows are also important feeding grounds for sea turtles. Five of the world's seven sea turtle species occur here, including the critically endangered Hawksbill sea turtle, and nest along parts of the coast despite the wars.

The Gulf's waters also support the world's second-largest population of dugongs outside Australia, with an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 individuals. Dugongs are marine mammals that depend almost entirely on seagrass to survive.

Scattered across these waters are coral reefs covering an area the size of Goa. They support several fish and invertebrate communities. Importantly, they can survive extreme conditions, making them a natural laboratory for scientists to understand how coral ecosystems might respond to climate change.

Together, the Gulf is a finely balanced ecological network adapted to extremes. At its peak, in the 18th to the early 20th centuries, the Gulf's oyster beds supported a thriving economy that supplied nearly 80% of the world's Basra pearls, named after a port in Iraq. This system collapsed when Japanese cultured pearls entered the market in the 1920s.

Then people found oil. By the 1970s, oil had made West Asia one of the world's fastest-growing regions. Today, the Gulf region alone produces nearly a third of the world's oil, with around 800 offshore



Birds take flight around vessels in Persian Gulf waters near Hormuz Island, Iran, in 2011. NIMRA/CC BY-SA

platforms and more than 25,000 tankers moving in and out every year. Nearly a fifth of the world's oil passes through these waters.

This wealth has driven rapid urbanisation. The number of people has tripled in four decades, with more than 85% of people and economic activity concentrated within 100 km of the coast.

### Coastlines remade

Large-scale land reclamation, dredging, and engineering have transformed the shorelines. In Dubai alone, more than 60% of the natural coastline has been changed.

Projects such as Palm Jumeirah have altered currents and sediment flows, eroding sand in some areas and causing sand to accumulate in others, leaving beaches to be maintained constantly.

Nearly two-thirds of the salt flats have disappeared, mangroves have shrunk, and natural beaches have been replaced with seawalls that eliminate nesting grounds for birds and turtles. Seagrass beds and mudflats have been buried under land reclamation projects, removing important nursery habitats for marine life.

The consequences have also extended offshore. Coral reefs have been buried or smothered by sediments while dredging and construction have disrupted natural flows.

These physical changes have been compounded by industrial pressures such as desalination and pollution.

The Gulf hosts about half of the world's desalination plants, with over 200 facilities producing around 11 million cubic metres of freshwater every day. They produce hot, saline brine, often laced with chemicals and heavy metals, that is discharged into the sea, where it accumulates in the semi-enclosed basin, further raising temperatures and salinity.

**The Gulf coastline is remarkably young. Formed 3,000 to 6,000 years ago as the sea flooded the Arabian basin through the Strait of Hormuz, it is today a shallow, semi-enclosed sea spanning about 226,000 sq. km, with an average depth of just 30 m**

Intake systems also remove plankton and larvae, disrupting the base of the food web.

### War and water

Algal blooms fed by sewage deplete oxygen and trigger mass fish deaths, such as those recorded off Kuwait's shores in 1999 and 2011. Chronic nutrient loading also disrupts coral physiology, increases bleaching, and suppresses the growth of seagrass.

Industrial pollutants further accumulate in marine life. The pearl oyster (*Pinctada radiata*), once central to Gulf economies, has borne the brunt of pollution and sedimentation, which have left behind degraded oyster beds.

Leaks, spills, and tanker traffic continue to damage ecosystems. The 1991 Gulf War spill devastated coastlines, mangroves, bird populations, and fisheries while oil fires spread pollutants far afield. The UN Compensation Commission awarded Kuwait \$52.4 billion for a clean-up; decades later, the effort is still underway.

These threats persist even today. The oil infrastructure continues to be a target of drones and missiles, and rising temperatures trigger repeated coral bleaching, pushing already stressed ecosystems to the brink.

The consequences extend far beyond the sea. Across West Asia, the Arabian

oryx, populations of the Asiatic cheetah, and the Arabian leopard have fallen sharply due to hunting and other conflicts. The Arabian oryx vanished from the wild by 1972. Then, the Phoenix Zoo in the U.S., Fauna & Flora International in the U.K., and the World Wide Fund for Nature reintroduced it in Oman in 1982, with populations later established across Saudi Arabia, Israel, the UAE, and Jordan. Meanwhile, the Asiatic cheetah survives in Iran in critically low numbers.

Repeated wars have also derailed conservation efforts. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 followed by the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 brought wildlife protection to a near halt, leaving protected areas to decay and wildlife populations to crash.

### A narrowing window

Today, the Gulf is among the worst affected marine regions on the planet. But signs of awareness do exist. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar have imposed limits on shrimp trawling. The UAE and Saudi Arabia are also leading mangrove restoration efforts and, together with Kuwait, have established marine protected areas to conserve what remains of these ecosystems.

As marine biologist and New York University (Abu Dhabi) professor John Burt noted in his work on Gulf ecosystems, the region's highly centralised governance – for all its deficiencies – could also facilitate rapid environmental action. What is required is for ecological concerns to be prioritised at the highest levels.

Time is also limited. Ecosystems such as coastal swamps, salt pans, oyster habitats, and the nesting sites of endangered sea turtles are already approaching points of no return. (Ipsita Herlekar is an independent science writer. [ipsitaherlekar@gmail.com](mailto:ipsitaherlekar@gmail.com))



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## GS Paper II – Polity

### FM defends Centre's right to levy cess, says Constitution allows it

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday emphatically reiterated the Centre's right to collect cesses and surcharges, saying the Constitution allowed it and the Centre would continue to use the provision.

However, she added that over the last six years, the government had spent on the States 105% of what



Nirmala Sitharaman

it had collected through cesses and surcharges. That is, its spending has exceeded its collections.

She was replying to the Lok Sabha debate on the Finance Bill 2026, which was passed on Tuesday following the conclusion of her speech.

"The Constitution makers knew what they are doing, and we all pay respects to them," she said, in response to comments by several MPs about the Centre's levy of cesses and surcharges that are not part of the divisible pool that is shareable with the States.

## GS Paper II – Polity

### Govt. revamps UDAN scheme with changes in subsidy

**Jagriti Chandra**

NEW DELHI

In a significant policy shift, the Centre has extended the subsidy period for airlines on select Tier-2 and Tier-3 routes from three to five years, after a large share of those routes fell into disuse. The shift comes under the modified UDAN scheme, approved by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday with a total outlay of ₹28,840 crore.

The subsidy will also shift from a levy embedded in airfares to direct funding from the exchequer.

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## GS Paper II – International Relations

# India said to have bought Iran LPG after U.S. eased sanctions

Sanctioned tanker Aurora carrying Iranian LPG expected to shortly reach the west coast port of Mangalore, say sources, LSEG data; Indian official denies knowledge of the cargoes being bought

**Reuters**

NEW DELHI

India has bought its first cargo of Iranian liquefied petroleum gas in years after the U.S. temporarily removed sanctions on Tehran's oil and refined fuels, LSEG trade flows and three industry sources said.

India had shunned Iranian energy in 2019 under pressure from Western sanctions. The tanker was initially bound for China, LSEG data showed.

Sanctioned tanker Aurora carrying Iranian LPG is expected to shortly reach the west coast port of Mangalore, the sources said and LSEG data showed.

The South Asian nation



**Guzzling down:** The Iranian LPG cargo will be shared among the three major fuel retailers, say sources. REUTERS

has been hit hard by the disruption of energy shipments via the Strait of Hormuz caused by the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran.

The Iranian LPG cargo will be shared among the three fuel retailers, Indian Oil Corp, Bharat Petroleum

Corp, and Hindustan Petroleum Corp.

The cargo has been purchased from a trader, and payment will be made in rupees, the sources said, adding that India was exploring buying more Iranian LPG cargoes.

Still, an official said he was not aware of Iranian cargoes being bought.

"[There are] no loaded cargoes from Iran, we have not heard of that," Rajesh Kumar Sinha, special secretary in the federal shipping ministry said Wednesday at a press conference.

The three firms and India's oil ministry did not respond to Reuters requests for comments.

The world's second-largest LPG importer is battling its worst gas crisis in decades with the government cutting supplies for industries to shield households from shortage of cooking gas.

India consumed 33.15 million metric tons of LPG last year.



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## GS Paper II – Polity

### 2 resign from NCTP over Transgender Persons Bill

**Ashna Butani**

**Ragavi M.**  
NEW DELHI/CHENNAI

Soon after the Rajya Sabha passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, which takes away the right to self-determination of gender, two members and community representatives resigned from their posts at the National Council for Transgender Persons (NCTP). They cited the amendment Bill which they called “a step backward for our fundamental rights to self-identification and dignity.”

Kalki Subramaniam, member and Southern region representative, submitted her resignation to the Union Minister, stating that she cannot continue to hold a seat at a table where “collective voice has been silenced on a matter of such existential importance.” She said she will be filing a public interest litigation plea in the Supreme Court, with many others.

Rituparna Neog, member and North East region representative, said, “I cannot be a part of something that refused to listen to the community,” she told *The Hindu* on Wednesday evening.

## Transgender Bill receives RS approval amid uproar

**DMK, Trinamool demanded the Bill be sent to a select committee of the House for scrutiny; Union Minister says it will ensure protection to persons who face discrimination due to biological issues**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

**T**he Rajya Sabha on Wednesday passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, a day after the Lok Sabha cleared the legislation. The Opposition had demanded the Bill should be sent to a select committee of the House for further scrutiny as it had provisions that would have an impact on the dignity of the third gender people.

Union Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar, countering the Opposition's charges against the Bill, said it is an effort to take along all segments of the society together.

The Minister said the Bill will ensure protection to only those who face discrimination due to biological issues and added that transgender people will continue to get legal recognition and protection.

“The Narendra Modi government is committed to protecting all those people who are suffering due to biological reasons,” he said



LGBTQIA+ community members during a protest demanding repeal of the Transgender Amendment Bill, 2026, in Mumbai. REUTERS

adding that transgender welfare boards have been set up in over 30 States. “This Bill will bring administrative clarity and protect rights of the transgender persons,” he said, adding: “This Bill is not merely a legal reform but a pathway to justice for those who have long faced social exclusion and discrimination due to their identity.”

**Takes away rights: DMK**  
DMK MP Tiruchi Siva argued that the amendments take away the right of self-

identification and forces transgender persons to present themselves before a medical board for gender identification. “I am voicing for the people who cannot come to Parliament,” Mr. Siva said and demanded that the Bill must be sent to a select committee for consultation with all stakeholders, legal experts, civil society and transgender community.

Trinamool Congress MP Saket Gokhale said that only 32,000 transgender persons out of their five lakh population (according to

2011 Census) have obtained certificates and identity cards so far under the existing Act. “They are afraid to come out in the first place,” he said.

### Social bias: Trinamool

Mr. Gokhale said that 31% of transgender people in India have attempted suicide and out of them, 50% were below the age of 20. “They are attempting suicide because of the discrimination that they are facing everyday,” the Trinamool MP said adding that as if social discrimination was not enough, now the government is going to “start discriminating” against them.

CPI(M) MP John Brittas said the new legislation is an exclusionary restrictive measure.

“Recently, the Supreme Court-appointed committee conveyed to the government not to proceed with this piece of legislation. What happened to that? Why is it that the government is not considering the request of the Supreme Court-appointed committee?” Mr. Brittas asked.

### SC panel calls to scrap Bill on gender choice rights

**Abhinav Lakshman**

NEW DELHI

A Supreme Court-constituted Advisory Committee headed by former Delhi High Court judge Justice Asha Menon has sent a resolution to the Government of India, requesting that the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, be withdrawn as the proposal to “deny self-identification” of gender went against the decision of the Supreme Court in the 2014 *NALSA versus Union of India* verdict.

The Chairperson said that the amendment Bill had come as a “great shock” and would amount to a “tremendous setback” to efforts to mainstream transgender communities so far, *The Hindu* has learnt.

The Bill proposes to remove a section that recognised transgender people’s “right to a self-perceived gender identity”, redefine a transgender person, and introduce the requirement of a medical board’s nod to acquire a transgender certificate and identity card. The Bill was passed by voice vote in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, amid an Opposition-led walkout.



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## GS Paper II – International Relations

# An energy transition driven by ethics

**F**ossil fuel dependency is ripping away national security and sovereignty, and replacing it with subservience and rising costs," UN climate change arm executive secretary Simon Stiell told European Union officials and ministers in Brussels on March 16, against the backdrop of the U.S.-Israel-Iran war. He added that the disruption serves as an "abject lesson" on the pitfalls of banking on fossil fuels.

The war in West Asia has disproportionately affected economies such as India which gets nearly 60% of its crude oil from the region. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has forced state-run refineries to declare force majeure – an act of god. Pushing a country like India to abandon its remaining coal or domestic gas reserves without a take-off ramp could lead to industrial collapse.

Mr. Stiell's comments are reminiscent of the expressions of impatience by climate negotiators and stakeholders about how slow countries have been to switch away from fossil fuels: in 2021, activist Greta Thunberg called the COP26 talks "blah, blah, blah".

The West used fossil fuels to build its strategic reserves and today can't deny India and other countries like it the same opportunities, especially as the latter waits for its renewables infrastructure to mature and expand. At the same time, India's reliance on fossil fuels from West Asia is obviously why its economy is currently hostage to the region's geopolitical crisis.

### Dependence on minerals

Mr. Stiell et al. have argued that renewables are immune to such blockades, which is true in part: if the flow of fossil fuels stops today – it is pinched in the Strait of Hormuz – the 'flow' of energy also stops, because we burn fossil fuels to release energy. With renewables, the critical minerals are not the source of energy itself.



Vasudevan Mukunth

Once the state has set up solar panels and erected wind turbines, their ability to generate energy cannot be embargoed because they will operate as long as the sun shines and the wind blows.

However, critical minerals still represent a significant bottleneck, with additional complications such as the number of industries that need them – from consumer electronics to missile targeting, with the renewable energy sector somewhere in between. The supply chains for many minerals are even more concentrated than oil. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC+) controls around 40% of global oil production. And while the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Australia plus Chile extract most of the cobalt and lithium, respectively, a single country – China – currently processes almost 60% of the world's lithium, 70% of its cobalt, and 90% of rare-earth elements.

With renewable energy also making intensive use of hardware, a blockade of the required components, whether it be turbine blades or magnets based on rare earth minerals, would be just as effective as one of oil. At that point, it is once again a question of whether war could break out between the world's primary mineral-processing hubs.

### Fossil versus mineral

The "abject lesson" is only so abject because of the prevailing oil situation. If, say, the West Asia conflict had not begun and Brent crude was \$65 a barrel, the trade-off for renewables could return to seeming like a moral luxury – in turn retrenching the value of 'shock' events like wars to push the world away from fossil fuels. And to that extent, perhaps Mr. Stiell et al. are smart to seize the chance.

Without a war driving prices up, the high upfront capital expenditure for renewables is less attractive to governments. If oil is cheap, the payback period for a large offshore wind farm might be

15 years; if gas prices jump 50%, this period could shrink to 4-5 years. In other words, sans a war, governments would have continued to place fiscal responsibility before energy sovereignty.

In the same scenario, the world's dependencies on the critical mineral supply chain presents itself as a scarier prospect. If West Asia is stable and oil is flowing, the U.S. and its allies would likely view the option of trading West Asian oil for Chinese minerals as a net loss in strategic autonomy, which could encourage countries to reshore mineral mining and processing capabilities even before the energy transition picks up pace.

For India, a more stable supply of oil together with its arguably excessive focus on easing business could render its off-ramp into a long and gentle slope with room to continue using its domestic coal and cheap imported gas to power industrial growth while waiting for renewables to mature.

In other words, the Strait of Hormuz blockade could be forcing India to accelerate investments in renewables simply because it has no choice.

### Fear not an effective tool

Mr. Stiell is in effect wielding fear as his primary tool, especially when he says "dependency is ripping away national security". The effects of fear never last – especially when countries imagine new ways to outmanoeuvre these threats. What ultimately matters is ethics. The virtue of renewables should be debated, and adopted, in order to save the planet rather than for saving the economy for another month.

This also matters because when oil is cheap, the environmental damage of mining lithium, or human rights issues in Congolese cobalt mines are scrutinised more heavily by the public – and while this is as it should be, it should not just be because oil is cheap.

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Short-term gains or geopolitical shocks should not dictate green energy shift



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## GS Paper II – Polity

# The Transgender Persons Amendment Bill, a flawed fix

**T**he Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 (Bill No. 79 of 2026), introduced in the Lok Sabha on March 13, 2026, makes several sharp changes to the 2019 Act. It narrows the definition of “transgender person” to only specific socio-cultural identities such as kinner, hijra, aravani, jogta, eunuch, or biologically-defined intersex variations, or persons forcibly compelled into such an identity through mutilation, castration, amputation, or any surgical, chemical or hormonal procedure. It explicitly excludes persons with different sexual orientations and non-heteronormative gender fluid identities.

The Bill removes the right to “self-perceived gender identity” from Section 4(2), replaces the simple District Magistrate process with a medical board “authority” headed by a Chief Medical Officer, and mandates hospitals to report every transgender surgery to the District Magistrate and the authority.

### Perpetuating structural problems

The government claims that the new amendments fix the vagueness and implementation failures of the 2019 Act. Every year, thousands of intersex infants are killed or undergo medically unethical, non-consensual sex-selective surgeries that mutilate their bodies without regard for lifelong physical and psychological trauma, all in pursuit of a false “normalcy”. Millions of intersex individuals remain ghosts in our Census systems, their births and deaths unregistered, rendering them invisible to legal protections and social services.

Even the highest authorities fail to grasp the fundamental distinctions between sex identity and gender identity, or between intersex variations and transgender identities, which fuels rampant discrimination. The Bill itself refers to male and female as “gender identity”, which is fundamentally wrong – male and female are sex identities. By clubbing sex identity under the gender column, the Bill creates new problems where it is meant to solve existing ones.

The government does not have reliable data on transgender and intersex persons in India. They want to grant us rights but do not know who we are. Separating sex and gender identity as different categories on official documents would address the root causes of this problem.

Despite the new wording, the Bill still lumps “persons with intersex variations” inside the definition of a “transgender person.” The term “transgender persons” often conflates distinct identities. The Trans Act’s definition includes persons with intersex variations under “transgender”, which erases intersex-specific needs. Intersex is a natural biological spectrum (recorded 1%-2% globally). Transgender identity is a psychological and social construct.



**Gopi Shankar Madurai**

Special Monitor for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sexual Characteristics (SOGIESC) Rights, National Human Rights Commission of India

The Bill only deepens the conflation of gender identities and ignores core crises

Retaining this conflation under one label violates rights under Article 21 to bodily integrity and privacy. It leaves out intersex infants without any specific ban on “normalising” surgeries and ignores repeated calls for separate intersex legislation.

The Bill’s definition also contradicts established international standards: the United Nations and the World Health Organization define intersex as innate variations in sex characteristics that do not fit typical male or female binaries, requiring distinct legal recognition and explicit protections against non-consensual medical interventions. By forcing intersex persons into a transgender category, the Bill undermines these global definitions and erodes the very human rights framework that India has committed to uphold.

The Bill leaves the outdated title, National Council for Transgender Persons, and all State Welfare Boards unchanged. It ignores the long-standing proposal to rebrand them as a National GIESC Welfare Council and State GIESC Welfare Boards (GIESC is Gender Identity/Expression and Sex Characteristics). This keeps the entire policy architecture trapped under the problematic “transgender” umbrella instead of creating a scientifically accurate, inclusive framework. The government continues to promote a single identity at the national level.

This heteronormative bill erases the reality that GIESC communities, including transgender persons, may have diverse sexual orientations such as transgay, translesbian, transbisexual, or queer.

### Legally empowering exploitative structures

New clauses in Section 18 introduce rigorous imprisonment (between five to 14 years) for forcing adults or children into “transgender presentation” plus begging or servitude. Yet, the Bill does nothing to regulate or dismantle the colonial hijra jamath-gharana system. By targeting only external perpetrators while leaving internal hierarchies untouched, the amendment effectively legitimises and empowers the long-standing hijra jamath-gharana system, codifying it into law. These structures are not inherently traditional; earlier Indic frameworks were more inclusive and rooted in a broader, affirmative understanding of diverse identities, free from later external influences.

At present, chief hijra nayaks control chelas’ earnings from begging and prostitution, trapping gender non-conforming children (often abandoned) in bonded labour. Meanwhile, thousands of gender non-conforming children, abandoned or rejected by families, are thrust into exploitative hijra jamath gharanas, havelis, and dayars, where education is a distant dream; instead, and forced into begging and prostitution. State police often refuse to register missing

child complaints for gender non-conforming children, and there are no dedicated policies to address their vulnerability to trafficking and abuse. There is also no framework for reform, rehabilitation, or protection of minors within these systems. By protecting these colonial-era identities without evidence-based safeguards, the government is undermining earlier inclusive traditions.

The Bill contains no requirement for genetic counselling by medical geneticists before certification, intersex surgeries and health management. It offers no mandate for India-specific longitudinal studies on “affirming surgeries” and raises serious privacy concerns due to inadequate safeguards.

Instead of addressing the problems faced by diverse GIESC communities such as administrative barriers and unregulated medical practices which include gender-affirming surgeries and hormone therapies (Government of India promotes freely despite severe health risks) the Bill offers only superficial measures with little relevance to their needs. Despite the 2019 UN CRPD recommendations to prioritise intersex welfare and dignity, these concerns remain largely neglected.

### No intersectionality

The Bill contains no intersectional lens for caste, disability, poverty or religion. Transgender persons from Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe or disabled backgrounds will continue to face compounded discrimination with zero targeted remedies. It also fails to protect India’s family-dependent societal structures by skipping any requirement for rigorous, evidence-based research before policy changes. Most critically, the Bill is completely silent on civil and marriage rights of diverse GIESC identities. It offers no provisions for marriage, adoption, inheritance, divorce, or succession for transgender persons, leaving them without full legal recognition in family law, and perpetuating their exclusion from the very institutions that define citizenship and dignity in Indian society.

The 2026 Amendment Bill tightens some definitions and increases penalties for forced exploitation, but leaves every core structural flaw untouched – the hetero-normative erasure of diverse SOGIESC identities, the complete neglect of civil and marriage rights, the legal entrenchment of colonial hijra structures at the expense of ancient Indic heritage. India needs a scientific, culturally grounded approach that separates biological sex characteristics from gender identity, prioritises evidence over ideology, bans non-consensual intersex surgeries, ensures equal rights, dismantles exploitative systems, and protects the dignity of intersex persons and gender non-conforming children. The Constitution demands nothing less.



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## GS Paper III – Science & Technology & Economics

# Indian tech start-ups raised \$9.1 bn in 2025, 23% rise: Nasscom-Zinnov study

**The Hindu Bureau**

BENGALURU

In 2025, Indian tech start-ups raised \$9.1 billion, marking a 23% year-on-year increase, even as capital became more selective, milestone-linked and increasingly concentrated in scalable, commercialisation-ready ventures, said a Nasscom-Zinnov analysis.

Deep-tech funding surged 37% to \$2.3 billion last year with AI driving 91% of investments. Over 140 tech mergers and acquisition deals were recorded in 2025, a near double rise over last year. Seed and early-stage deals ac-



Deep-tech funding surged 37% to \$2.3 billion, the report said.

counted for 74% of total funding activity with AI capital deployment and innovation driving the momentum, said the study.

Rajesh Nambiar, president, Nasscom, said, "India's start-up ecosystem is

entering a more disciplined phase of growth, and AI is clearly at the centre of this transition, emerging as core infrastructure for India's next innovation cycle. This signals growing global confidence in India's ability to build, deploy and commercialise AI at scale across sectors ranging from enterprise software to defence and industrial systems."

### AI to market

The next chapter would be defined by how effectively we translate AI innovation into market adoption, intellectual property and globally competitive plat-

forms, he added.

The report titled "Momentum to Maturity" said India's Start-up Ecosystem at a Strategic Inflection Point, Indian Tech Start-up Report 2025," offers an in-depth analysis of the evolving dynamics of the country's technology start-up ecosystem.

As per the report, with an estimated 31,000-34,000 start-ups, new venture formation is increasingly concentrated in established hubs and proven sectors, highlighting investor preference for infrastructure readiness, talent density and faster commercialisation pathways.



## GS Paper III – Environment

# India raises clean-energy ambition with 60% non-fossil fuel power goal by 2035

**Jacob Koshy**  
NEW DELHI

Updating its climate goals, India has pledged that by 2035, 60% of its installed electric capacity will comprise non-fossil sources. It also aims to reduce by 47% the intensity of emissions per unit of GDP from 2005 level and to increase its carbon sink to 3.5 billion tonnes – 4 billion tonnes.

These targets make up its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), which are to be communicated to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

“We will easily achieve these goals... [with] the speed with which we are expanding our non-fossil

### Green goals

The targets set for 2035 under the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) are part of India's formal climate pledges under the Paris Agreement



Reduce emissions intensity of GDP by **47%** from 2005 level

Achieve **60%** installed electric power from non-fossil fuel energy resources

Create carbon sink of **3.5 to 4.0 billion tonnes** of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent through forest and tree cover

As a signatory to the Paris Agreement, India was required to update its NDC by 2025 with actions towards curbing fossil fuel and improving energy efficiency

sources,” Union Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said at a briefing on Wednesday following a Cabinet meeting.

As a signatory to the Paris Agreement, India was

required to issue an updated NDC in 2025, which spells out its voluntary actions towards transitioning away from fossil fuel and improving energy-efficiency measures.

At the 30th edition of the Conference of Parties in Belem, Brazil, in November last year, Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav said that India would announce the NDC by the “year-end”.

India's current NDC, officially conveyed to the United Nations in August 2022, commits to the following by 2030: having 50% of its installed electric power from non-fossil sources; reducing the intensity of emissions per unit of GDP by 44%; and increasing its carbon sink to at least 2.5 billion tonnes to 3 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent.

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## GS Paper III – Economics

# MoPNG issues directions to strengthen natural gas infra

### **The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) has instituted reforms to ease provisions towards expanding piped gas network – both domestic and commercial. Late on Tuesday, the government invoked the Essential Commodities Act (ECA), seeking to accelerate the push for piped natural gas.

The Ministry stressed

that the reforms were aimed at “addressing delays in approvals and access to land, and enabling faster development of natural gas infrastructure, including in residential areas”, alongside instituting an investor-friendly network and improving last-mile connectivity.

The gazette notification underlines that in housing areas, the relevant entities would have to grant necessary permission to “lay,

build or expand” a pipeline within three days of receiving an application. Further, they would have 48 hours to accord approvals for last-mile connectivity.

In public areas that are not housing areas, the gazette clarifies that if the entity concerned neither rejects nor grants permission for laying of pipelines within the stipulated timelines, the application would be “deemed approved”.



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## GS Paper III – Economics

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# What is at stake at the WTO's MC14?

What is the context in which MC14 is taking place? What has weakened the WTO's dispute settlement system? What are the key issues before MC14? Why is the e-commerce moratorium contentious? What role should India play at MC14?

### EXPLAINER

Prabhash Ranjan

#### The story so far:

The World Trade Organization's (WTO) 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) will take place from March 26 to 29 at Yaoundé, Cameroon. The conference is the WTO's highest decision-making body and generally meets once every two years. It is empowered to make all decisions on WTO law and to chart a path for the organisation's future work.

#### What is the context in which MC14 is taking place?

MC14 is taking place amid rising geopolitical rivalry between the U.S. and China, ongoing global conflicts, and the mounting securitisation of international trade relations. Furthermore, trade multilateralism appears to be in retreat, while unilateralism is on the rise. The U.S. has, over the last year, launched a massive assault on trade multilateralism by weaponising tariffs. Arbitrary tariff impositions by the U.S. grossly violate the cardinal rules that underpin the WTO, namely the most favoured nation (MFN) rule, which epitomises non-discrimination, and the obligation not to impose tariffs beyond bound rates. The U.S. has also begun signing new, one-sided trade agreements with countries through tariff coercion.

#### Why is trade multilateralism reeling under a crisis?

There is a growing belief in Washington that the WTO, which the U.S. was instrumental in creating in 1995, has not served American interests well. The meteoric rise of China in the last two decades has significantly narrowed the gap between Washington and Beijing. Moreover, China's accession to the WTO, which the U.S. facilitated, has not had the desired impact of disciplining Beijing's state-led industrial policies. Consequently, the U.S. now wants to



GETTY IMAGES

eliminate all legal constraints that apply to it, such as WTO law, to take on the Chinese threat head-on. For this reason, the U.S. paralysed the WTO's dispute settlement system by relentlessly blocking the appointment of members to the Appellate Body – the organisation's highest judicial arm.

Another key reason for the crisis is the WTO's inability to draft new trade rules due to consensus-based decision-making. Over the past three decades, the WTO has created only two new agreements: the Trade Facilitation Agreement and the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. The sluggishness in forming new trade rules has pushed countries to seek new venues for trade law-making, such as free trade agreements (FTAs).

#### What are the key issues in MC14?

A fundamental issue at MC14 is whether plurilateral agreements, such as the Investment Facilitation for Development, endorsed by over 120 countries, and the Agreement on Electronic Commerce, should be incorporated into the WTO rulebook.

Although the WTO is a multilateral organisation, it allows plurilateral trade agreements – agreements between fewer

than all WTO members. These are typically included in Annex 4 of the WTO treaty. Plurilateral agreements bind only the signatories. However, for inclusion in Annex 4, such agreements must be approved by consensus among all WTO members.

Given the difficulty of achieving consensus, many countries believe that plurilateral agreements are the way forward to reinvigorate the WTO's legislative function. On the other hand, a few countries, such as India, argue that inaugurating the plurilateral rule-making door would open a Pandora's box and lead to the fragmentation of the system. It will be riveting to see whether countries can break this logjam at MC14.

Another key issue is the WTO's e-commerce moratorium. First agreed in 1998 and renewed every two years, this agreement among WTO member countries not to impose tariffs on electronic transmissions has benefited digital trade. This moratorium is set to expire on March 31. While the developed world wants it to be made permanent, the choice is not so easy for developing countries like India. Given the rise in digital trade, continuing the moratorium could lead to significant revenue losses for

developing countries.

The 166 WTO member countries meeting in Cameroon are also expected to deliberate on issues of special and differential treatment (SDT) for developing and least developed countries (LDCs). SDT, part of the 'WTO reforms', recognises that, since not all WTO members are on an equal footing, special rights shall be conferred on developing countries and LDCs. The U.S. is keen to weaken the SDT principle by prohibiting larger economies, such as China, India, Brazil, and Indonesia, from enjoying special rights.

On dispute settlement reforms, it is critical to unequivocally demand the restoration of the Appellate Body to put the WTO's dispute settlement system back on track.

The U.S. is also expected to use MC14 to challenge foundational WTO principles, such as the MFN rule. Developing countries that benefit from these principles should strongly oppose such efforts.

#### What should be India's role?

India, which has always maintained its support for trade multilateralism, needs to walk the talk. It should regain its role as the normative leader for the third world by using the MC14 to articulate the importance of multilateralism and to forge alliances with other developing countries.

To do so, New Delhi should not shy away from re-visiting its deeply entrenched positions, such as opposing plurilateral agreements. India, along with other countries, should also consider other innovative solutions, such as electing Appellate Body members through voting. If MC14 fails to strengthen the WTO and promote trade multilateralism, it will represent a victory for America's blatant unilateralism and its effort to establish a new global trade order rooted in coercion. This will be detrimental to the developing world.

(Prabhash Ranjan is a Professor and Vice Dean (Research), Jindal Global Law School. Views are personal)

### THE GIST

MC14 takes place amid rising U.S.-China rivalry, global conflicts, and the retreat of trade multilateralism, with unilateralism and tariff coercion on the rise.

Key issues include plurilateral agreements, the e-commerce moratorium, SDT, and restoring the Appellate Body, with developing countries seeking to protect the WTO system.



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## GS Paper III – Environment

# Cauvery basin to face dry spell until 2050, says study

**Jacob Koshy**  
NEW DELHI

+ While a warming climate is expected to significantly increase the flow of most major Indian rivers, the Cauvery basin stands out as an exception. The river faces a potential “near-term decline” of approximately 3.5% of its waters between 2026 and 2050, even as its northern counterparts brace for floods, according to a study by researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Gandhinagar, published in the peer-reviewed journal *Earth's Future*.

Given the fraught history of Cauvery water sharing between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the study suggests that despite climate models projecting increased rainfall from global warming in India, the river might not benefit. In such a situation, river interlinking projects, such as the proposed Godavari-

### Worry lines

An IIT Gandhinagar study paints a grim picture

- Flows in the Cauvery basin are expected to decline in the 'near-term' (2026-2050) and rise only 'negligibly' from 2051
- The river will not benefit from the increased rainfall from global warming in the decades ahead
- River interlinking projects such as the proposed Godavari-Cauvery link could help



The Cauvery riverbed lies largely exposed at the Mukkombe dam in Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu. R. VENKATESH

Cauvery link project, might be necessary, the researchers say. The study finds that the Cauvery experienced a 28% decline in streamflow between 1951 and 2012, based on data from Kollegal which, one of the authors told *The Hindu*, “well represented” actual flows in the Cauvery.

While the study is based on a modelling study and is reliant on an extrapolation, it attempts to reduce

errors that can creep in from blindly applying climate models to predict the impact of global warming on Indian rainfall. To do that, the authors use a novel statistical framework and base their analysis on actual river flows between 1951 and 2012, measured at nine stations representing nine major river basins, and then extrapolates the data using a “constrained modelling” approach.