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GS Paper II – International Relations

Transforming India's nuclear power landscape

In the 2025-26 Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that India's installed nuclear power generation capacity would rise from 8,180 MW to 1,00,000 MW (100 GW) by 2047. She also signalled transformative legislative changes, leading to the introduction and rapid passage of the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill in December 2025.

The scope of change envisaged is dramatic. All nuclear activity had hitherto been the exclusive preserve of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE). The SHANTI Act promises a transformation of India's nuclear energy landscape by bringing in private companies to build, own and operate nuclear power plants, provides statutory status to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), and revises the liability framework to encourage private and even foreign investment. The 1962 Atomic Energy Act and the 2010 Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA) stand repealed and replaced by the SHANTI Act (2025).

However, to realise the promise of 100 GW will need putting the nuts and bolts of implementation in place, the notification of supportive rules and regulations, consonant with the transformative spirit underlying the SHANTI Act.

Driving the reforms

Two key pronouncements drive the reform: achieving Viksit Bharat by 2047 and net-zero emissions by 2070. As society moves up the development ladder, the nature of energy consumption shifts to electricity from traditional modes of energy such as firewood, fossil fuels for transport and heating, and coal for industry. Consequently, the "net zero" target also imposes a parallel shift away from fossil fuel-based power generation towards renewables and other low carbon options. In 2024, India's per capita electricity generation was 1,418 kWh (kilo-watt-hour) compared to 7,097 kWh for China and 12,701 kWh for the United States. The OECD average is a little above 8,000 kWh. This indicates the distance that India needs to travel to achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat. The second goal of "net zero" imposes its own conditionalities. In 2024, India's per capita energy consumption was 7,893 kWh, indicating that only one-fifth of the energy consumption is from electricity.

In June 2025, India's electricity generating capacity reached 476 GW (giga-watt) and approximately 50% was non-fossil fuel sources. Renewable sources made up 227 GW, consisting of solar power 111 GW, wind power 51 GW, and hydropower 48 GW, with an additional 5GW from micro-hydel projects and bioenergy 12 GW. In addition, nuclear power – which is seen as low carbon and not strictly renewable as it consumes fissile material as fuel – was 8.8 GW. Thermal power, primarily based on coal accounted for 240 GW. India has committed to increasing the



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installed capacity of renewables to 500 GW by 2030. However, the installed capacity does not reveal the full picture. Renewable sources generation depends on the time of day, climatic and seasonal conditions and geography. India generated a total of 1,824 TWh (tera-watt-hours) during 2024-25. Renewable sources accounted for 403 TWh (solar 144 TWh, wind 83 TWh, hydro power 160 TWh and bioenergy 16 TWh). Nuclear power accounted for 57 TWh while thermal power generation was 1,363 TWh. Thermal power, therefore, accounted for 75% of the electricity generated with 50% of the generating capacity compared to 50% renewables capacity providing 22%, while nuclear power contributed 3% with 1.8% of generating capacity. The reason is that thermal and nuclear sources provide for steady baseload power. For renewables to provide at scale, large investments in energy storage become essential. This is why renewables capacity growth is now facing headwinds with projects of 40 GW languishing without power-purchase contracts.

India's nuclear power journey and options

Conservative estimates indicate that India will need to grow its electricity generating capacity to over 2,000 GW to reach Viksit Bharat levels. Even with more efficient and cheaper battery storage, renewables such as solar and wind farms are about 10 times more land intensive when compared to thermal power plants; since coal is inconsistent with "net zero", nuclear power remains the preferred baseload means to achieve "net-zero".

India's first nuclear power reactor went operational in 1969 in Tarapur. Today, the Nuclear Power Corporation (NPCIL) is managing 24 nuclear power plants with an installed capacity of 8,780 MW (one reactor in Rawatbhata has been shut down). The two oldest are Boiling Water Reactors (BWR), two at Kudankulam are Russian design VVERs (pressurised water reactor or PWR) and the balance are Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWR). The original design was 220 MW; this has been successfully indigenised and adapted to 540 MW and 700 MW designs.

The DAE budget has averaged between ₹24,000 crore and ₹26,000 crore during the last three years. India's 700 MW PHWR construction cost is \$2 million per MW, among the lowest globally for nuclear power. To add 90 GW over the next two decades would need an outlay of over \$200 billion (₹18 lakh crore), only feasible with private investment; both domestic and foreign.

In 2017, the government gave administrative and financial approval for building 10 reactors of 700 MW each in fleet mode but work has not begun. The logic of fleet mode was to streamline production to gain economies of scale. Three other locations – Jaitapur (Maharashtra), which is planned to have six reactors of 1,650 MW each based on a French (EDF) design, and Mithi Virdi (Gujarat) and Kovvada (Andhra Pradesh), each

slated to have six reactors of 1,000 MW capacity using Westinghouse-Toshiba and GE-Hitachi designs – have been under consideration for over a decade. The likely power generation costs from these unproven designs is likely to be over \$5 million per MW.

Many industries have captive power plants, ranging from 10 MW to 200 MW; most of these are fossil fuel-based. Current estimates for the installed capacity are 90 GW with plants of 100 MW and above accounting for two-thirds capacity. The government has allocated ₹20,000 crore to research and develop five indigenous models of Small Modular Reactors (SMR) of 5 MW, 55 MW and 200 MW capacity by 2033. Meanwhile, the indigenised 220 MW PHWR model (15 are currently operational), can be a reliable workhorse. With efficient project management, some amount of modularisation, and economies of scale, the time from first pour-of-concrete to going-on-stream can be reduced to 40 months. Steel, primary metals, cement, petrochemicals and paper industries, and now, the data centres, have shown interest.

Three-front nuclear strategy

To achieve the 100 GW target requires careful planning across three fronts. The EdF and Westinghouse designs are comparatively new and will need to be indigenised to bring down costs. China has demonstrated this by building a supporting industry base and plans to build 33 reactors of 1,000 MW each at below \$2 million per MW over 10 years. Second, the DAE should identify institutions to accelerate research and development for indigenous SMRs, especially of the molten-salt reactor design. Another research area is in the use of Thorium cladding with HALEU (High Assay Low Enriched Uranium) that can provide an alternative to the Breeder Reactor route in order to permit early exploitation of India's thorium reserves. Third, the indigenised 220 MW PHWR model is ready to be modularised as an economically viable replacement for a number of captive power plants; some Indian private sector companies have the requisite design, fabrication and construction experience. Since nuclear power generation requires high upfront capital costs but low operating costs over a long (60 years) operating life, an appropriate financing model will need to be worked out. Existing exclusion zone regulations, intended for multiple reactors at one site will need to be modified for captive single unit reactors.

Conceptually, the SHANTI Act attempts a division between strategic- and defence-related nuclear activities and the civilian power generation; now, the rules and regulations to be issued must make this clear. Issues of nuclear power tariffs, ownership of nuclear fuel, waste management, insurance and liability, dispute settlement mechanism, and an autonomous regulator will need to be dealt with in a transparent manner. Only then will the SHANTI Act deliver on its promise.

Realising the 100 GW target requires SHANTI Act implementation alongside transparent resolution of tariffs, fuel ownership, waste management, insurance, dispute settlement, and regulatory autonomy



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GS Paper II – International Relations

The World Trade Organization is flailing

Trade multilateralism is facing its biggest stress test since the Second World War. The United States' coercive unilateralism and attempts to dilute foundational rules such as the most-favoured nation (MFN) treatment threaten to hollow out the entire system. At such a critical juncture in history, the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s fourteenth Ministerial Conference (MC14), which recently concluded in Yaoundé, Cameroon (March 2026), was expected to reassure the global community about the importance of a rules-based global trading order, which limits hegemonic tendencies.

Regrettably, the MC14 failed to meet this challenge. While no one expected the MC14 to turn up trumps, the fact that the 166-member WTO failed to reach consensus on even issuing a ministerial declaration outlining future work is disconcerting. To paper over the cracks, the WTO's Director General declared that the MC14 had produced a Yaoundé package comprising certain draft decisions, that is, decisions yet to be finalised, which will be discussed at Geneva in the months ahead.

Tale of two moratoriums

The MC14 will go down in history as the one that broke the long-standing consensus on moratoriums for two things. First, customs duties on electronic commerce transactions. Since 1998, WTO member-countries agreed not to impose customs duties on electronic commerce transactions to keep digital trade flows free. The moratorium has been extended every two years since its inception. However, at MC14, countries were unable to reach an agreement on extending the moratorium, which, thus, lapsed on March 31.

Today, countries are free to impose tariffs on digital trade flows, though it is expected that the WTO's General Council will deliberate on this issue again in the months ahead. While this may provide developing countries with an



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The WTO's fourteenth Ministerial Conference has showed up the cracks in the rules-based system

opportunity to augment their revenue, it will burden consumers and businesses. A significant development that accompanied the end of the e-commerce moratorium was the signing of an e-commerce agreement (ECA) by 66 WTO members, which prohibits customs duties on digital trade.

Although not yet part of the WTO rulebook and binding only for the signatories, this agreement will establish two separate legal frameworks: the WTO, which allows tariffs on digital trade, and the ECA, which does not.

The second moratorium, in force since 1995, barred non-violation complaints under the WTO's TRIPS Agreement. The WTO allows countries to file claims not only for legal violations but also when a country's measures nullify another country's anticipated benefits, even if those measures are legal.

This raises concerns for developing nations that their laws to promote public health could provoke complaints from developed countries alleging that they nullify the benefits of their intellectual property. Although such complaints are possible, history suggests they are unlikely to succeed, as evidenced by the failure of all 10 non-violation complaints related to trade in goods at the WTO.

Plurilateral innovation

A so-called low-hanging fruit at the MC14 was the incorporation of the plurilateral Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) agreement into Annex 4 of the WTO Agreement, with support from 129 of 166 countries. However, it did not materialise due to India's opposition. New Delhi opposed the IFD's inclusion for multiple reasons, including the absence of legal safeguards to incorporate plurilateral agreements into the WTO acquis.

Plurilateral agreements to be incorporated into the WTO should be open and inclusive rather

than exclusive. The failure to include the IFD Agreement has deepened the WTO's legislative crisis, as the organisation struggles to establish rules for 21st century challenges.

No road map for the future

The MC14 failed to provide a clear road map for WTO reforms. Critical issues such as reviving the stalled appellate function of the WTO's dispute settlement system have been postponed. Any attempts by the developed world, especially the U.S., to undermine key principles, such as MFN and the special and differential treatment, must be strongly resisted.

It is often said that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. The history of trade multilateralism demonstrates that whenever trade multilateralism slows, American unilateralism tends to rise. This occurred in the early 1970s when the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations floundered, leading to the enactment of strict measures such as Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974. This provision empowers the U.S. President to take unilateral action against perceived unfair trade practices. We are currently witnessing a similar situation, but this time without Congressional approval and with far greater vengeance. A setback at the MC14 will exacerbate these trends.

Additionally, the failure of the MC14 will accelerate the trend of countries creating new trade rules outside the WTO. To keep the WTO relevant, innovative solutions must be found, such as plurilateralising the WTO. India should take the lead in developing the legal guardrails needed for the development and adoption of plurilateral agreements within the WTO. Achieving this will require a novel approach and unflinching political commitment to trade multilateralism.

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GS Paper II – Polity

Conversion politics, the challenge to secularism

There have been recurrent media reports of arrests of Muslims from diverse social and professional backgrounds on allegations of participating in organised networks that facilitate religious conversion from Hinduism to Islam. These reports have predominantly emerged from North India, particularly Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Most of the cases remain under investigation. If substantiated, such developments could indicate a new form of ideological churn within segments of Muslim society in India. Otherwise, they risk being perceived as manufactured narratives driven by an ideologically motivated state.

The last widely acknowledged instance of mass conversion to Islam occurred in February 1981 in Meenakshipuram, Tamil Nadu, where 558 Dalits embraced Islam to escape entrenched caste oppression. Reflecting on the episode, Atal Bihari Vajpayee observed that Hindu society suffered from long-standing ills, particularly distinctions based on birth and caste. The conversions were thus rooted in inequalities internal to Hindu society.

Contentious issue

Religious conversion – particularly from Hinduism to Islam and Christianity – has long been a contentious issue. Mahatma Gandhi, in particular, according to Laura D. Jenkins, author of *Religious Freedom and Mass Conversion in India*, viewed mass conversions not only as a threat to the poor and the uneducated but also to anti-colonial unity.

The most symbolically powerful conversion in modern Indian history was that of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who embraced Buddhism in 1956. On October 13, 1935, Ambedkar had declared his intention to leave Hinduism at the Depressed Classes Conference in Yeola. For Ambedkar, conversion was an act of emancipation. In the intervening period, he repeatedly urged Dalits to leave Hinduism for



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The most symbolically powerful conversion in modern Indian history was that of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who embraced Buddhism in 1956

any religion of their choice.

He even took the initiative for Dalits to convert to Sikhism, which found unexpected support from Dr. B.S. Moonje, a prominent leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, who encouraged Hindu leaders to endorse the conversion. However, this met opposition from Mahatma, C. Rajagopalachari and Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. One of Gandhi's principal arguments against Ambedkar leaving Hinduism was the belief that Dalit followers would abandon him once he ceased to be a Hindu. Had Gandhi been alive today, he would have realised how profoundly mistaken this assessment was. The enduring reverence for Ambedkar among Dalits, despite, and indeed because of, his conversion, stands as a powerful rebuttal to that prognosis.

Concerns surrounding religious conversion and legislative attempts to regulate conversion began even under the colonial administration. For instance, the Raigarh State Conversion Act (1936) and the Patna Freedom of Religion Act (1942) sought to monitor conversions. The question of religious freedom and conversion was debated in the Constituent Assembly, culminating in the formulation of Article 25(1) of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise, and propagate religion. But constitutional recognition of religious freedom did not produce lasting political or social consensus.

In independent India, a series of anti-conversion laws have been enacted and periodically amended by various secular governments well before Hindu nationalists emerged as a dominant electoral force, primarily in response to concerns over Christian missionary activities. The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act (1967) and the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam (1968) are prominent examples. However, Hindutva right organisations argued that these laws are

inadequate to effectively curb religious conversion.

Specific instances

Consequently, several States ruled by the BJP have amended existing legislation. The scope of these laws has expanded beyond concerns about Christian missionary activity to include conversions to Islam, particularly in the context of allegations framed as "love jihad". The Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018, for instance, illustrates this trajectory. The law was further tightened in 2022, with enhanced penalties. In 2025, the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Bill, 2025 proposed increasing punishment from three to 10 years, extending up to 20 years or even life imprisonment in extreme cases. However, these have not yet been notified, as the Bill was returned by the Governor for reconsideration. The implementation of these laws has generated significant legal disputes.

Under the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Act, 2022, reports indicate that 20 cases were filed in 2023 and 18 more by September 2025. Of the cases brought to full trial under the 2018 Act, several have resulted in acquittal. Such legislation has not been confined to BJP-ruled States. The Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act (2006), for example, was enacted under a Congress government, and the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Act 2002, introduced by the J. Jayalalithaa-led AIADMK government and later modified in 2006 by the M. Karunanidhi-led DMK government. This underscores the broader political consensus across ideological lines on regulating religious conversion.

These acts, in practice, have often encouraged vigilantism, leading to instances of violence and disruptions to India's secular social fabric. Therefore, it is imperative that governments review these acts.

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GS Paper II – Polity

The executive office without a limit

India has developed a convention limiting a third presidential term, but the Constitution places no such restriction on the Prime Minister's tenure. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi completing 8,931 days in office, this asymmetry invites closer scrutiny.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

V. Venkatesan

In March 22, 2026, Narendra Modi completed 8,931 days as head of an elected government in India, combining over thirteen years as Chief Minister of Gujarat (from October 7, 2001 to May 21, 2014) with three consecutive terms as Prime Minister. The milestone surpassed the record of Pawan Kumar Chamling, who served as Chief Minister of Sikkim for 8,930 days. Neither the congratulations from within the ruling dispensation nor the alarm from its critics engages the constitutional question the milestone makes unavoidable: why does India's Constitution impose no limit on how long a single individual may hold the office that wields actual executive power?

India is unusual among large democracies in this respect. The United States adopted the Twenty-Second Amendment in 1951, responding to Franklin Roosevelt's four consecutive terms. South Korea, Brazil, Colombia, and Indonesia all impose presidential term limits. Among parliamentary democracies, the question is considered less urgent because the Prime Minister serves at the confidence of the legislature. But this theoretical availability of removal is what requires scrutiny in the Indian context.

Constituent Assembly's rationale
The Constituent Assembly's reasoning was articulated by B.R. Ambedkar in his speech of November 4, 1948 introducing the Draft Constitution. Ambedkar drew a distinction between "the daily assessment of responsibility," available through questions, no-confidence motions, and adjournment motions, and the "periodic assessment" offered by fixed-term elections. The daily assessment, he argued, was far more effective. No term limit was needed because the legislature's confidence served as a rolling check.



Return to office: Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the swearing-in ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi in 2024. RV. MOORTHY

What the Tenth Schedule broke
The Fifty-Second Amendment (1985) inserted the Tenth Schedule, providing for the disqualification of any legislator who votes against the party whip. The Supreme Court in *Kihoto Hollohan vs. Zachillhu* (1992) upheld its constitutionality as a measure to protect the integrity of the electoral mandate. But the Tenth Schedule fundamentally altered the relationship between legislature and executive that Ambedkar had relied upon. Under the anti-defection regime, a ruling-party member who votes against the government on a confidence motion faces disqualification. The no-confidence motion becomes a dead letter whenever the ruling party has a working majority.

Nor does the British safety valve operate in India. Indian political parties have no institutionalised mechanism for leadership challenges. The anti-defection law locks legislators into party loyalty; the absence of intra-party democracy locks the party into loyalty to its leader.

The comparative evidence
Tom Ginsburg, James Melton, and Zachary Elkins, in their study of executive

term-limit evasion, showed that leaders in multiple regions have sought to extend their tenure through constitutional amendment, replacement, or judicial interpretation. Ginsburg and Aziz Huq further argued that democratic decline more often proceeds through incremental institutional decay than through sudden authoritarian rupture. India has not needed to abolish a term limit because it never had one. The question is whether the absence of a formal constraint, combined with the neutralisation of parliamentary accountability, produces the same structural risks that term limits elsewhere are designed to prevent.

The presidential irony
India has developed a convention against a third presidential term, though the presidency is largely ceremonial. No President has served more than two terms. The expectation satisfies the three-part test for constitutional conventions laid down by Ivor Jennings in *The Law and the Constitution* (1959): precedents exist, the actors believed themselves bound by a rule, and the rule has a reason. The office that holds no real

executive power is constrained by convention. The office that holds virtually all executive power is constrained only by the electorate's periodic verdict, with the anti-defection law largely disabling other accountability mechanisms.

The strongest counter-argument is that voters have endorsed Mr. Modi's tenure three consecutive times, and that a term limit would override their expressed preference. The objection is serious; a term limit is, in a real sense, anti-democratic. But it rests on the premise that Ambedkar relied upon: that periodic elections, combined with parliamentary accountability, suffice to discipline executive power. If that accountability has been structurally impaired by the Tenth Schedule, elections must carry a heavier burden. And elections, however free, are a weak constraint on the compounding advantages of prolonged incumbency: control over appointments to regulatory bodies, the Election Commission, and the higher judiciary; the capacity to shape the information environment; and the ability to calibrate policy for electoral benefit across multiple cycles.

What might be done
The more natural reform is to restore the mechanism the framers relied upon. Exempt votes on confidence motions from the Tenth Schedule's disqualification provision, so that legislators can remove a government without forfeiting their seats. A more ambitious possibility is a constitutional amendment limiting consecutive terms as Prime Minister or Chief Minister, while permitting a return after a gap. The State-level dimension is equally pressing, given the extended tenures of leaders such as Jyoti Basu, Naveen Patnaik, and Pinarayi Vijayan.

The 8,931-day milestone forces attention to whether India's parliamentary system retains the self-correcting capacity the framers relied upon. (V. Venkatesan is a journalist and legal researcher)

THE GIST

▼ The Constituent Assembly envisioned a daily assessment of the Prime Minister's office through questions, adjournment motions, and no-confidence motions, reinforced by fixed-term elections as an efficient alternative to explicit term limits. However, the anti-defection law altered this intended system of checks.

▼ An argument against imposing a term limit is that it could override the voters' expressed preference. Yet, if parliamentary accountability is structurally weakened by the Tenth Schedule, elections bear an even heavier responsibility.



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GS Paper II – International Relations

Why did Iran war not affect China's energy security so far?

How has China diversified its energy sources and consumption patterns to strengthen energy security?

WORLD INSIGHT

Avinash Godbole

As the Israel-US war on Iran has meandered on, India has faced the shortage of liquified petroleum gas (LPG) and experienced a social panic over the possible shortage of petrol and diesel. One does not see similar news from China despite its bigger economy, larger consumer market and role as a supplier to global markets, raising the question of how China escaped the early consequences and how, and in what ways it may be affected in the future. The answer to that question lies in what China has done in the past two decades and how its geography, its position as the world's largest polluter, its stringent actions against the local air pollution

challenges and its concerns over status have combined to protect it from the current crisis.

How did it tackle the Malacca dilemma?

About 15 years ago, China's concerns over its dependence on the Malacca strait for trade and energy transits, and the near permanent American presence in the vicinity were real. The country sought to address this by building the capacity to create strategic petroleum reserves (SPR) and used long-term contracts to fill those up. Today China has nearly 120 days of SPR storage and it may be tapping into some of that. Data suggests that a combination of China's oil reserves and diversification may allow it to bypass imports from the Strait of Hormuz for several months.

China's second approach to reducing the dependence on the Malacca strait was

to build pipelines to import oil and gas from Central Asia and Russia. If the straits were a geopolitical challenge, its stable relations with its Central Asian neighbours made the geography an opportunity.

Now almost 20 per cent of China's crude oil imports happen through these pipelines, including an estimated 900,000 barrels per day from Russia. Consider that against the failed attempts to establish the Iran-Pakistan-India and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipelines, which have been stalled for a combination of reasons. On the other hand, China's national oil companies like Sinopec, CNPC and CNOOC, have traditionally had deeper pockets and China has been an active negotiator in conflict zones like Sudan or Angola and their proactive strategies have also helped it create a good diversification in its imports sources.

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GS Paper II – Polity

States can reap benefits of women's reservation: PM

Modi reiterates that States that have done well in population control will not lose seats during delimitation, calls gherao of judicial officers in Malda 'maha jungle raj' sponsored by Trinamool

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday sought to reach out to women voters in West Bengal, stating that his party was committed to "real empowerment of women" through 33% reservation.

Addressing a public meeting in Cooch Behar, Mr. Modi said it was necessary to increase the role of women in decision-making for the country. "Therefore, the government has scheduled a special session of Parliament on April 16, 17, and 18. This right of our mothers and sisters has been pending for 40 years. Our government has enacted a law to provide 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies," he said.

He added that ensuring reservation for women was the responsibility of all parties and urged them to cooperate on the issue.

Mr. Modi reiterated that the States which have done well in population control would not lose seats during delimitation. "From Cooch Behar, I once again assure all States that the good work done in population



Warm welcome: Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated by Union Minister Sukanta Majumdar in Cooch Behar on Sunday. PTI

control will not result in any loss in seats. Everyone will benefit...," he said.

Mr. Modi said that the government wanted to ensure in Parliament "that additional seats are created for women so that States can reap major benefits from it". The reservation will be implemented from the 2029 Lok Sabha election.

Women voters are crucial to the outcome of the 2026 West Bengal Assembly election. The BJP has been trying to win them over by raising issues of crimes against women, particularly by fielding the mother of the doctor who was raped and killed at R.G. Kar Hospital in August 2024.

The Prime Minister also referred to the alleged atrocities on women at Sandeshkhali and said, "On one side are the cries of sisters and daughters subjected to brutal atrocities, like those in Sandeshkhali. On the other side is Modi's guarantee of security, dignity and empowerment for women."

Trinamool Congress MP Sagarika Ghose accused the saffron party of hypocrisy on women's issues. "Shri @narendramodi is speaking about the Women's Reservation Bill and 'nari shakti'. Modi insults women leaders; he has insulted Bengal CM @MamataOfficial with his 'Didi oh didi' taunts, @BJP4India has garlanded those con-

victed of rape and given tickets to those accused of sexual assault. @BJP4India and Modi are anti-woman to the core; their hypocrisy on women's representation is glaring," she said in a social media post.

'Maha jungle raj'

Highlighting the gherao of seven judicial officers in Malda's Mothabari on April 1, Mr. Modi described the incident as a reflection of "Trinamool Congress-sponsored maha jungle raj".

He said the Trinamool government does not give much importance to any constitutional institution, and the Malda incident was a reflection of that.

"The law-abiding citizens were shocked by the way judicial officials were held hostage. What kind of a government is this, where even judges are not safe? How can you expect the safety of common people from such a government...," Mr. Modi said.

Thirty-five persons have been arrested in connection with the incident, and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has taken over the probe.



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GS Paper II – Polity

FCRA amendment is an attack on minorities: Kharge at poll campaign

The Hindu Bureau
IDUKKI

All India Congress Committee (AICC) president Mallikarjun Kharge has labelled the proposed amendment of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) as an “attack against minorities.” Addressing a United Democratic Front (UDF) election campaign at Elappara in Idukki on Sunday, Mr. Kharge alleged that the amendment is not merely a legal change but a targeted strike.

“The FCRA amendment is not just about the public; it targets the Christian community. Just as the Waqf Bill affects the Muslim community, the FCRA amendment will impact the Christian community at the same level,” said the Congress president.

Following in the foot-



AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge at a UDF election campaign at Elappara in Idukki on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

steps of Rahul Gandhi, Mr. Kharge raised the Sabarimala gold theft case, asserting that the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government remains “under the shadow” of the scandal.

On LDF, BJP

He further alleged a “mutual understanding” between the LDF and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), claiming that Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and

Prime Minister Narendra Modi are following the same administrative model.

Referring to the ongoing crisis in the tea plantation sector in Peerumade, Mr. Kharge accused the LDF government of forgetting promises made to workers. He also addressed the escalating human-wildlife conflict in the district and promised that a UDF government would take “effective steps” to prevent

attacks and ensure timely compensation for victims.

He further said that the UDF would prioritise the distribution of title deeds to all eligible residents in the district, calling it a “serious concern.”

NDA roadshow

Meanwhile, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) intensified its campaign with a massive roadshow in Munnar for Devikulam constituency candidate S. Rajendran. Led by former Tamil Nadu BJP president K. Annamalai, the march moved from Old Munnar to Market Junction. The Devikulam constituency is currently witnessing a high-stakes triangular fight following the entry of S. Rajendran—a three-time former Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] MLA—into the poll scenario as the NDA candidate.



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GS Paper III – Environment



Elastic rules

India needs proper reckoning of plastic collection and reuse targets

The latest iterations of India's plastic waste management rules, announced on March 31, suggest that the government has hit a wall in its attempts to curb plastic waste collection and recycling. The Plastic Waste Management Rules, first introduced in 2016, have been amended periodically, reflecting a policy framework in constant evolution. The intent is to make companies that produce and use plastics invest in recycling plastic so that, ultimately, less plastic is wasted and dumped in landfills, rivers, oceans, and public spaces. The paradox is that the same qualities that have made plastic ubiquitous – adaptable to a near infinite range of consumer goods, easy to produce, accessible to the richest and the poorest, and flexible in a way that metal can never be – also make it near impossible to incentivise collection and reuse. This is why the Rules were necessary.

Since 2022, when the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regime came into force, producers, importers and brand owners – makers and users of plastic packaging and raw materials – were required to collect and process plastic waste equivalent to 35% of the plastic they introduced into the market in 2021-22, increasing to 70% in 2022-23 and 100% by 2024-25. The amendments of 2026 bring in new mandates. This time, companies must ensure that recycled content makes up a minimum (and increasing) percentage of their plastic packaging annually. For instance, producers, importers and brand owners must ensure that rigid plastic packaging (Category I) contains at least 30% recycled material, rising to 60% by 2028-29. There are also similar 'reuse' obligations. But, strangely, companies that fail to meet their targets in 2025-26, the gazette notification says, may carry forward the shortfall for up to three years, provided they make up at least a third of the deficit annually. In effect this means that the 2025-26 target can be met in 2028-29. Also, at present, there is no evidence or even a claim by the government that all companies are collecting 100% of their obligations. By the government's own responses to Parliament it hovers from 50%-60%, and yet there are no targets set for 2025 and beyond. This seems to suggest that the government has given up on pushing companies to collect or recycle plastic, or has shifted focus to having them use recycled plastic irrespective of how it is sourced. There are provisions on using 'trading certificates' that suggest the logic is to let market economics decide on what is an environmental problem. Without a proper reckoning of collection and recycling targets, the new targets on reuse, which are already elastic, risk being ignored, thus undermining the intent of the EPR regime.

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GS Paper III – Environment

Kerala's spending falls short of its green ambitions

Fiscal constraints and political incentives protect sensitive sectors, leaving scientific research and environmental protection with limited support

DATA POINT

Vasudevan Mukunth

In recent years, Kerala has framed its development strategy around equity and environmental protection. Between 2021-22 and 2026-27, it anchored its State budgets to the pillars of a knowledge economy and green growth. To increase the profile of sectors that have, across States, often faced neglect, the State also introduced a separate environment budget in 2024 and a comprehensive research and development (R&D) budget in 2025.

However, the commitments in budget documents are not matched by allocations to environmental protection and research. In fact, the State's fiscal structure and political incentives prevent it from translating its priorities into sustained investments and effective governance.

The allocation to Scientific Services and Research grew from ₹165.4 crore in 2022-23 to ₹288.6 crore in 2026-27 – a nominal increase of 74% over four years but less considerable (coming to a CAGR of 15%) after accounting for inflation and the State's strong GSDP growth. Indeed, Kerala's total R&D spending, after bringing existing departmental expenses together, as a fraction of its GSDP, is less than half of India's 0.6% of GDP (Chart 1).

The 'Ecology and Environment' head received ₹27.8 crore in 2026-27; the Department of Environment and Climate Change, ₹10.82 crore; the Kerala State Biodiversity Board, ₹13 crore; and the Climate Adaptation Mission, ₹1 crore. These are all token amounts or close to that. The 'green' spending in the 2026-27 budget (₹947.89 crore) is again less than 0.5% of total State expenditure. And much of it is existing spending that it has re-labelled 'green' (Chart 2).

Around 71% of Kerala's revenue receipts go towards salaries, pen-

sions, and interest payments – the third highest among States (Chart 3). Capital expenditure is only 8% of total spending. Remittances also exceed 20% of the State's GSDP (Chart 4). Overall, the State has limited fiscal space for new priorities.

In this setting, the goal becomes to protect politically sensitive sectors and to dilute long-term public goods. And scientific research and environmental protection in particular lack organised constituencies, even as their costs are immediate.

For example, in 2011, the Gadgil Committee recommended designating 64% of the Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive areas. The Kasturirangan Committee then reduced the extent of ESA to 37%, limiting restrictions to harmful industries and mining. Finally, the Kurian Committee removed another 1,197 sq. km, bringing the final extent to roughly 24%.

Weaknesses in how the State evaluates, regulates, and coordinates institutions reinforce these constraints. For example, the State has not evaluated allocations to the Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment (KSCSTE) against patents, publications, technology transfers or policy impact. It established a standard operating procedure for the Brahmapuram landfill only after it suffered a fire in 2023. And while the 2026-27 budget allocated ₹100 crore to a 'Rare Earth Critical Minerals Mission', KSCSTE, the body that directs the State's science policy and funds its network of research institutes, received only ₹87 crore in the same budget.

Kerala has an educated workforce and genuine strategic assets in sectors such as rare-earth minerals and renewable energy. However, a knowledge economy also needs sustained public investment and missions and institutions that are better coordinated. The State's prevailing fiscal structure and policy choices don't support these conditions.

Persisting gaps

The data for the charts were sourced from the State budget documents, Kerala Migration Survey 2023 Report and Environment Budget 2026-27

CHART 1: Kerala's budgetary allocation to Scientific Services and Research over the years (in ₹ crore)



CHART 2: Sector-wise share of the 2026-27 Kerala Environment Budget (in %)

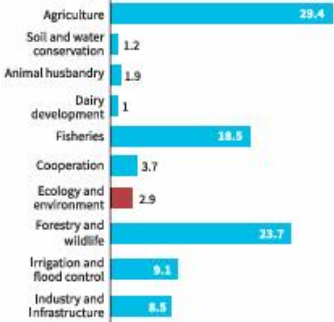


CHART 3: Salaries, pensions, and interest payments as shares of Kerala's annual revenue receipts (in %)



CHART 4: Kerala's inward remittances as a share of the Gross State Domestic Product over the years (in %)

