GS Paper II – Polity **Date: 06.05.26**

How 'bulldozer justice' undermines the law

Sandeep Phukan

The sight of a five-year-old gifting a toy to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on March 27 at Gorakhpur made for a tender photo moment. The Chief Minister returned the gift and asked the child to focus on her studies.

A child showing her admiration for a political leader is nothing out of the ordinary, as leaders are meant to be role models for the younger generation. But the five-year-old's choice of toy – a replica of a bulldozer – raises uncomfortable questions. The episode not only shows public approval for "bulldozer justice", it also reflects the normalisation of extrajudicial action by the state. What is arguably a problematic political symbol is now part of our everyday consciousness and holds the potential to influence impressionable minds.

The much-hailed "bulldozer justice" model isn't just a negation of the concept of due process but a direct challenge to it.

Not the first time

Though "bulldozer justice" is now part of India's political lexicon, the concept of bulldozers being used as an instrument of state policy is not new. Instances of bulldozers being used to clear encroachments and demolish unauthorised houses in Old Delhi's Turkman Gate area in 1976 – when the country was under the Emergency imposed by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi– have been well chronicled.

However, there is a key difference in how such actions have been perceived over time. From being examined as part of the excesses of the Emergency by a judicial commission, bulldozer action is now being amplified as a symbol of the state's firmness in dealing with those who break the law. It is premised on the fact that judicial processes are cumbersome and come in the way of delivering instant retributive justice. In an era of 10-minute deliveries, government authorities are not immune to the same pressure. And since the judicial process does not follow a fixed timeline, some argue that this pressure is multiplied.

The image of swift destruction creates an impression of decisive leadership, but it also normalises the idea that executive authority can override legal safeguards

The drive for 'instant' justice

The backlog of cases across all courts in India has crossed 5.5 crore, with the figure in the Supreme Court alone accounting for over 90,000 cases. The India Justice Report 2025 noted that there are only 15 judges for every million Indians, as against a 1987 Law Commission of India recommendation of 50 judges per one million. In 22 of the 25 States, the same report noted, cases pending for over three years in subordinate courts amount to 25% of all pending cases. And across 25 High Courts, the number of cases which are pending for over five years account for 51%.

The burden of proof and the long road to litigation often act as a deterrent and, therefore, common citizens prefer quick justice. And when government authorities are under constant scrutiny and quick feedback, the pressure of "instant delivery of justice" is quite high.

But what an individual prefers, even a majority of them, cannot be the state's choice. In a state governed by the rule of law, there is no place for majoritarian populism. The tenets of criminal jurisprudence consider any crime against an individual as one against society. And the state can dispense justice only in accordance with the law.

The problem with bulldozer justice lies precisely in the fact that it substitutes spectacle for procedure. Demolitions carried out immediately after an alleged offence, often before investigations are completed, blur the distinction between punishment and an extrajudicial action carried out by the state. In such cases, the state assumes the role of investigator, judge and executioner at once. This dissolution of power between the organs of the state undermines the very principles that underpin a constitutional democracy.

There is another aspect that is often overlooked. If the demolitions of the homes of the accused are for purported violations of land or municipal laws, it begs the question: why did the government allow such a structure in the first place? Is it an admission that a corrupt system allowed such a home to be built right before the gaze of law enforcers? But if the demolitions are meant to convey a message of zero tolerance towards crime, then it runs foul of the law. The state cannot reduce itself to the level of vigilante groups, whose main purpose of existence is to hand out "instant justice".

The image of swift destruction creates an impression of decisive leadership, but it also normalises the idea that executive authority can override legal safeguards whenever public anger demands immediate retribution. Over time, this risks weakening institutional credibility and erodes citizens' trust in lawful processes.

Strengthen institutions

The real solution to public frustration with the justice system lies not in bypassing it, but in strengthening it. Expanding judicial capacity, filling vacancies, modernising court infrastructure and improving investigative processes would address the underlying causes of delay far more effectively than theatrical displays of coercive powers. Cases involving heinous crimes must be mandatorily assigned to fast-track courts that are focused on speedy disposals with frequent hearings.

However, a constitutional state derives its legitimacy not from the speed of punishment but from its unimpeachable principles and the fairness of its processes. "Bulldozer justice" may satisfy a demand for instant retribution, but it erodes the foundations of the rule of law and risks reducing the state to a vigilante group.

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GS Paper II – Polity

Cabinet approves four more judges for Supreme Court

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The move is a step towards tiding over the continuing crisis of pendency plaguing the court for years

The Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved an increase in the number of judges of the Supreme Court from 34, which includes the Chief Justice of India, to a total of 38.

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the top court currently has a sanctioned strength of 33 judges and the Chief Justice of India (CJI). A Bill would be brought in the next session of Parliament to raise this strength by four.

The Cabinet approval is a step towards tiding over the continuing crisis of pendency plaguing the court for years now, especially after the pandemic, when the facility of e-filing increased the inflow. The current backlog is 92,385 cases, and threatening to reach six figures even as the court is going into summer recess or "partial working days" in June.

The government's approval for more judges on the Supreme Court is after a six-year hiatus. Parliament last amended Section 2 of the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956 in 2019, raising the sanctioned strength from 31 to 33 (excluding the Chief Justice of India).

The Cabinet approval would be followed by an amendment to the 1956 Act. Article 124(1) gives Parliament the sole authority of increasing the sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court. Once the amended law comes into force, the Supreme Court Collegium would recommend judges to the government for appointment to the top court.

At present, there are two judicial vacancies in the Supreme Court. These are of the current Chief Justice of India Surya Kant's immediate predecessor, Justice B.R. Gavai, who retired in November 2025, and Justice Rajesh Bindal, who completed office in April 2026. Three more judges are scheduled to retire in 2026.

Justices J.K. Maheshwari and Pankaj Mithal will complete their tenure in June, and Justice Sanjay Karol in August 2026.

GS Paper III – Science & Technology

THE HINDU

Building bridges

Battery storage capacity must keep pace with solar energy generation

India scaled a record peak demand of 256.1 GW on April 25 with solar plants supplying 21.5% of the afternoon load – an all-time high, and the clearest signal yet that the country's installed solar fleet can do real work when the sun is overhead. But the same day's full 24-hour ledger told a more sobering story. When there was accounting for the whole day of April 25, solar contributed only about 10.8% of daily generation, and just 0.1% of the evening's needs after sunset. Solar's share of India's installed electric capacity has nearly doubled from about 15% in 2022 to nearly 28% in early 2026. However, solar accounted for roughly 5.6% of generation on India's peak-demand day in 2022 and only increased to the 10.8% of April – a clear indication of the yawning gap that remains between the realities of the present and what is possible. The bottleneck is not panels, land or ambition but the inability to use the vast stores of generated electrons through batteries. In fact, such is the paucity of battery storage that States which are prolific producers of solar power are being asked to halt their supply, lest it compromise the stability of India's electric grid. In 2025, India had to curtail 2.3 terawatt hours of solar generation between late May and December, equivalent to 18% of average monthly solar output, with 0.9 TWh (terra-watt hours) wasted in October alone. Given that producers of such electricity must be compensated, this ends up being a cost to the public exchequer which pays for power that was never delivered. The India Meteorological Department's forecast of a below-normal monsoon at 92% of the Long Period Average – the first such warning in 11 years – only sharpens the argument: a hotter, drier summer means greater daytime demand, which is precisely when solar should be doing the heavy lifting.

The encouraging news is battery economics. Standalone two-hour battery storage tariffs fell from around ₹2.21 lakh per MW per month in early 2025 to ₹1.48 lakh by year-end. The challenge is execution. Only 0.7 GWh of battery storage was operational in India by end-2025, with another 2 GWh expected by December 2026. The Centre and States must now focus less on tendering and more on commissioning – pairing every fresh solar auction with mandatory co-located storage and resolving the financing wall facing aggressively bid low-tariff projects. Solar capacity without storage is a half-built bridge.

GS Paper III – Environment

RE meets global electricity demand for the first time

Despite rapid renewable capacity growth globally, geopolitical shocks expose India's dependence on fossil fuel imports from West Asia

DATA POINT

Areena Arora

In 2025, global electricity generation increased by roughly 850 terawatt-hours (TWh), according to data from the Ember Energy Institute. This increase was supplied almost entirely by solar and wind energy, contributing 636 TWh and 204 TWh respectively. Other renewables added another 23 TWh. Coal generation and oil meanwhile fell by 67 TWh and 12 TWh respectively. This is the first year in which expanded electricity demand did not require an increase in fossil fuels.

Over the past decade, the cost of solar and wind energy has dropped steeply, and battery storage and grid integration capacities have improved drastically, supporting an uptick in reliance on renewable energy sources. In 2025, coal's share of global electricity production fell by just over 1% and solar energy increased by nearly 2%. The dependence on oil also went down.

Major superpowers are embracing the change. China, for instance, saw its fossil fuel generation fall for the first time since 2015. The country saw a strong 5% growth in electricity demand and a 15% growth in clean energy generation, met largely by solar and wind energy. Solar energy in China grew by 40% compared to 2024 and wind energy increased by 14%. Solar energy alone met two-thirds of the increase in the country's electricity demand in 2025, according to a report by Ember Energy.

Fossil fuel demand fell in India as well. Together, the fall in demand in India and China has pushed global fossil fuel generation to stagnation, according to the report. Fossil fuel generation fell in both India (down 3.3%) and China (down 0.9%), driven by clean power usage and demand growth.

How is this different from the earlier years? For two decades, even as renewable electricity capacity grew at double-digit rates, fossil fuel generation remained relevant and kept climbing because absolute electricity demand was rising faster than what renewables could cover. The rising consumption relied on coal and gas-fuelled energy. Even as renewable energy gained market share, it could not displace fossil fuels in absolute terms. However, that pattern reversed in 2025.

Globally, coal's share in electricity production declined from 36% in 2015 to 33% in 2024 **(Chart 1)**. Coal generation fell in absolute terms for the first time last year, as renewables outpaced demand growth. Natural gas also saw a modest 45 TWh increase, entirely offset by renewable gains.

The effect of war

India's crude oil imports fell by 17% year-over-year in March 2026 to 18.9 million tonnes, compared with 22.8 million tonnes in March 2025 **(Chart 2)**. The decline comes amid the closure of the Strait of Hormuz starting March 1 due to the U.S.-Israel conflict with Iran. This narrow waterway handles a significant share of global oil and gas shipments. India imports 89% of its crude oil from mostly Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The Indian basket crude (simplify) price averaged $113.49 per barrel in March 2026, compared with $72.47 in March 2025, a 56% increase year-over-year.

India's primary energy supply consists of coal, followed by oil, natural gas and then renewables **(Chart 3)**.

India's natural gas consumption rose in March 2026 despite supply disruptions. Natural gas available for consumption went up by 7% from March 2025. This increase came despite a 4.9% decline in domestic production. The gap was filled by LNG imports, which jumped by 20.5% by March this year. India's LNG imports reached 27 million metric tonnes (mmt) in 2024-25, the highest on record and double the 13.5 mmt imported in 2011-12. India's LPG imports also surged with expanded household access. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana increased LPG connections from 62% of households in 2016 to nearly 100% by 2025, driving imports to 18 mmt in 2025-26 from 16.48 mmt in 2020-21.

Crude oil, LNG, and LPG are all imported heavily from West Asian suppliers. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz disrupted all three simultaneously. India's response included accelerating renewable approvals, maximising refinery output, and paying ₹30,000 crore to oil marketing companies in FY 2025-26 to cushion LPG losses. LPG prices rose by ₹60 per cylinder after the conflict began.

On the flip side, India's renewable capacity grew by over 210% in the past decade. In FY 2024-25, renewable energy accounted for 89% of India's new capacity additions. Yet absolute energy dependence on imports has also deepened. India imports 89% of crude oil, 47% of natural gas, and 26% of coal despite being the world's third-largest coal producer. The renewable buildout has not yet reduced India's reliance on imported fossil fuels.

Renewable capacity takes years to translate into reliable, usable power and geopolitical shocks affect energy supply in the instant short-term. When the Strait of Hormuz closed in early March, India could not wait for wind farms to reach completion or battery capacity to scale. It responded by maximising output from existing coal and gas infrastructure, instructing domestic suppliers to prioritise domestic users and accelerating imports of LNG and LPG from alternative suppliers.

The global energy transition advanced significantly in 2025. India's renewable capacity is growing at the fastest rate globally. However, import dependence on a conflict zone exists alongside clean energy progress in India.

Towards sustainability: Solar panels being placed at the CNNC Tianwan tidal flat photovoltaic power plant in Lianyungang, in China's eastern Jiangsu province, on April 19.

Chart 1: The shift towards renewables for global electricity generation, with an uptick in solar and wind energy (Figures in %)

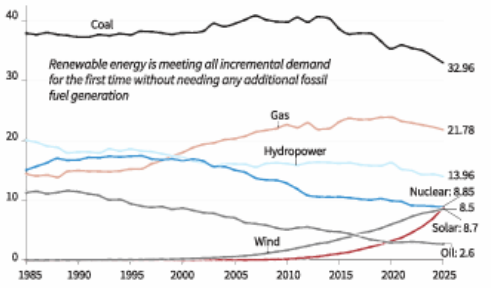


Chart 2: The fall in India's crude oil imports in March

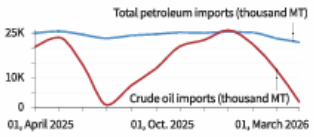
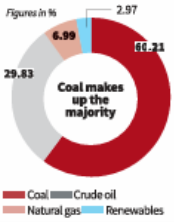


Chart 3: The makeup of India's energy sources



Data for the charts were sourced from Ember (2026), Energy Institute- Statistical Review of World Energy (2025) - with major processing by Our World in Data; Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell; Energy Statistics India 2025 report by the Ministry of Statistics and Planning Implementation

GS Paper III – Environment

India's energy security amid conflicts

The conflict in West Asia has shown how geopolitical shocks can transmit to India's domestic economy, given that the country imports over 85% of its crude needs. In a fragmented energy market, India's edge lies not in self-sufficiency but in optionality

EXPLAINER

Deepanshu Mohan
Aditi Lazarus

The conflict in West Asia has demonstrated the speed with which geopolitical shocks have been transmitted to India's domestic economy. The head of the International Energy Agency has described the current geoeconomic crisis as more severe than the combined shocks of 1973, 1979 and 2022.

The price of Brent crude oil rose to $109.03 per barrel after hitting highs of around $120 during the conflict. At a domestic level, India is projected to see its economy slow from 7.4% growth in FY26 to 6.5% in FY27 with a projected increase in inflation from 2.1% to 4.4% due to the impact of disruptions observed in the energy supply chains.

Energy security can no longer be defined solely as purchasing fuel at the lowest possible price. It now rests on resilience, diversification, and protection of macroeconomic stability.

Breakdown of the old energy market order

The Russia-Ukraine War was the first major warning to the pre-existing energy market order. It exposed the perils of energy dependence overnight.

Europe once relied on Russia for 45% of its gas imports. By 2025, that had fallen to 12%. Europe did not respond by chasing efficiency, it did so by buying insurance. Gas consumption by European Union (EU) countries fell by 20% between 2021 and 2024, while the combined imports of gas and liquified natural gas (LNG) declined by 18%.

Even when average LNG terminal utilisation was only 52% in the first half of 2025, Europe accepted spare capacity as the price of security.

While the war in Ukraine revealed the reliance on pipeline-based supplies, the conflict in West Asia demonstrated the reliance on sea transportation.

The Strait of Hormuz, through which approximately 25% of the world's crude oil is transported, has once again become an extremely important chokepoint, transmitting price shocks rapidly across global markets.

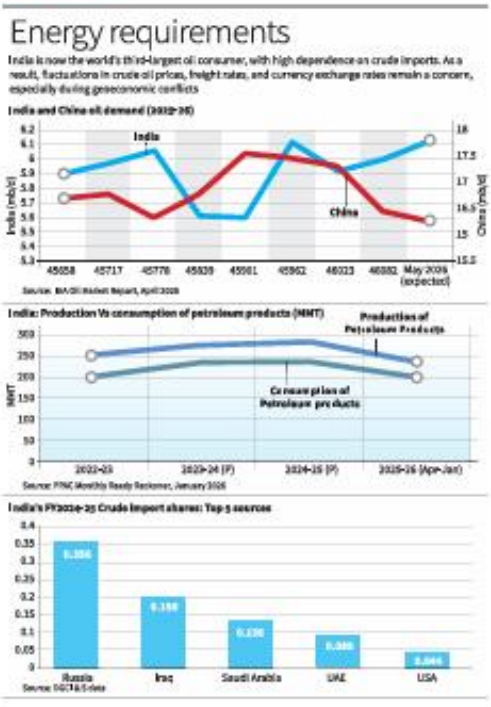
Other powers have adapted differently. China has locked in nearly 25 million metric tons of LNG per year through contracts, South Korea has secured 273 million barrels of crude oil that will transit from outside the Strait of Hormuz, while Japan has stockpiled 470 million barrels, which is equivalent to 254 days of consumption.

Gulf shore exporters have regained much of their bargaining power due to spare capacity. The International Energy Agency (IEA) forecasts a contraction of 80 kb/d in the global demand for oil on average in 2026, with a decrease of 236 kb/d for OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and 254 kb/d for Middle East, while non-OECD demand still rises 152 kb/d. In this weaker market, India's demand growth becomes strategically valuable.

How India gained more room to manoeuvre

The potential threat of disruption of the Indian oil imports is real and immediate, since the country imports over 85% of its crude needs, with roughly 45% of its imports transiting through the Strait of Hormuz.

Navigating the crisis: An Indian-flagged tanker carrying crude oil that transited through the Strait of Hormuz, is seen docked in Mumbai. ANI



For years, India has depended heavily on imports. But the country has handled repeated shocks better than many comparable importers. It is now the world's third-largest oil consumer.

According to OPEC's forecast, India's consumption is expected to reach 5.74 million barrels per day (mb/d) in 2025 and 5.99 mb/d in 2026, while the IEA projects that Indian crude demand will rise approximately 190 kb/d, compared with 80 kb/d for China.

As Chinese demand becomes flatter and more cyclical, India has become one of the few large engines of incremental oil demand.

Before 2022, Russia supplied barely 2% of India's crude imports, however, by FY2024-25, that figure was around 36%, making Russia India's largest supplier. Flows from Russia picked up again as Gulf disruptions intensified.

Now, India's import basket also includes countries such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and the United States, while remaining geographically diversified. In a fragmented energy market, India's edge lies not in self-sufficiency, but in optionality.

Tactical gains and structural risks

India has managed successive shocks well. First, India's crude oil dependence is extremely high, reaching 89.4% in FY2024-25. During that period, India produced only 28.7 million metric tons of crude oil domestically. As a result, fluctuations in crude oil prices, freight rates, and currency exchange rates continue to be a concern.

Second, geography still constrains strategy. Significant reductions in flows along Gulf sea lanes occurred due to tensions in 2026, and Indian LPG carriers, carrying a combined cargo of 97,000 metric tonnes required naval escort under Operation Sankalp. Diversification cannot bypass chokepoints.

Third, the energy transition creates fresh vulnerabilities. India's expansion into solar, batteries, electric vehicles (EV), and storage may reduce oil use over time. However, the reliance on lithium, cobalt, nickel, copper, and rare earths may increase in the future.

The way forward

India's dependence on critical minerals is tied to processing networks dominated elsewhere, especially by China, which controls over 90% of global rare-earth production, while India currently processes less than 5% of its projected 2035 battery-grade mineral requirements domestically. While India has adapted to the new oil order with considerable agility, having such tactical flexibility does not provide security in the long-term.

The next phase must focus on increasing larger strategic reserves, reducing the oil intensity in transport, strengthening maritime resilience, and ensuring security for supply chains of critical minerals. The real question is no longer whether India can switch suppliers during crises, but whether future crises will carry lower economic costs when they occur.

(Deepanshu Mohan is professor and dean, O.P. Jindal Global University. He is a visiting professor at LSE and a visiting academic fellow at University of Oxford. Srivenya Subramanian contributed to this column. Sriveniya and Aditi Lazarus are both research analysts with Centre for New Economics Studies, O.P. Jindal Global University)

THE GIST

- India has long relied on crude oil imports but has handled repeated geoeconomic shocks better than many comparable importers.
- Its import basket—spanning Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Russia, and the United States, remains geographically diversified.
- While expansion into solar, batteries, and EVs may reduce oil use over time, reliance on lithium, cobalt, nickel, copper, and rare earths may increase in the future.

GS Paper III – Science & Technology

GETTY IMAGES

Industrial heat pumps and the case for cleaning industrial heat

Industry accounted for nearly half of India's final energy consumption in 2025, much of it still tied to fossil fuels. Cleaning up industrial heat is therefore not just a climate issue, but also one of air quality, competitiveness, energy security, and worker health.

Srinivas Ethiraj

Industrial decarbonisation is often framed through solutions that promise deep emissions reductions (e.g. green hydrogen and carbon capture). These pathways are essential, particularly for hard-to-abate sectors, but are still several years away from large-scale adoption.

Even so, a significant share of manufacturing functions under very different operating conditions: one defined not by extreme temperatures but by the widespread demand for low-to-medium temperature process heat. Across sectors such as textiles, food processing, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and paper and pulp, this heat forms the backbone of production and continues to be largely met through combustion.

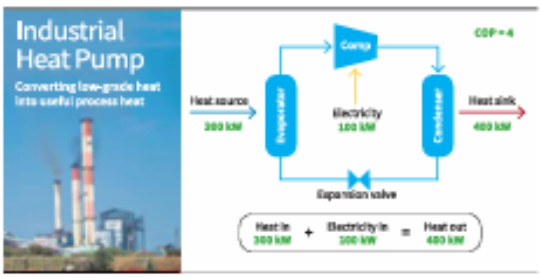
Industry accounted for nearly half of India's final energy consumption in 2025, much of it still tied to fossil fuels. The story becomes even sharper when we look at process steam. Industrial process steam alone is estimated to have generated 182 million metric tonnes of CO2 annually in India, along with 595 kilotonnes of SO2, 520 kilotons of particulate matter, and 516 kilotonnes of NOx.

This is why cleaning up industrial heat is not just a climate question. It is also an air quality, competitiveness, energy security, and worker-health question.

The opportunity is especially important for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in India. Spread across millions of units, MSMEs form the backbone of the country's manufacturing economy. Although they account for a smaller share of total industrial emissions (around 17%), their emissions are more fragmented and concentrated in sectors such as textiles, food processing, and paper. These are the sectors where coal, firewood, biomass, gas and furnace oil continue to run the conventional thermal systems such as boilers, thermic fluid heaters, dryers, evaporators and hot-water systems, etc.

Heat pumps as a solution

Heat pumps enter this conversation as one of the most practical technologies for this specific frontier of industrial heat. Unlike boilers, heat pumps do not create heat by burning fuel. They move and upgrade heat from one stream to another, using electricity. This is why they can deliver more useful heat than the electricity they consume. Industrial heat pumps often have a coefficient of performance of 3 to 5, meaning they can provide three to five units of heat for every unit of electricity consumed. Even at higher output temperatures, where performance falls, they can remain more efficient than simple electric resistance-based heating. This efficiency is the core of their decarbonisation value. It reduces the amount of electricity needed to electrify heat and improves the economics of switching away from combustion. If renewable electricity is available at competitive rates, the effective cost of heat from a heat pump becomes attractive even against conventional fuels.



What makes this transition compelling is the way industrial heat is currently produced and used. In a medium-sized textile finishing unit studied in Surat, around 92 percent of energy load was thermal, delivered through steam and industrial heat using a mix of Indonesian coal and lignite. The unit consumed roughly 0.42 kg of Indonesian coal per meter of processed fabric, illustrating the material intensity of fuel use embedded in routine operations. Despite this, steam is often used indirectly for generating hot water, maintaining vessel temperature, or heating surfaces rather than directly heating the product.

This reflects a central inefficiency. Conventional industrial thermal systems in such factories are often designed around the highest heat requirement, with boilers sized to meet peak demand. But many loads require lower-quality heat. In such cases, steam is generated at higher temperature and pressure, then reduced or diverted for lower-temperature applications. However, industrial heat pumps require a different engineering mindset: start with the lowest-temperature heat demand, then boost heat only where needed. This reverses the legacy boiler approach and can reduce overall energy use by 40-60 percent in suitable applications.

This right-sizing logic is particularly relevant in brownfield MSME clusters. Many boilers are old, oversized, manually operated in such settings, and run below optimal capacity. Replacing every boiler with a single large electric system is often not practical. But heat pumps can be modular. They can first serve specific loads: pre-heating boiler feedwater, supplying hot water, supporting dyeing and washing processes, recovering waste heat from effluents, or reducing steam demand in evaporators and drying streams.

Their role becomes even more interesting when heating and cooling are considered together. Industrial heat pumps can simultaneously generate hot water, steam, or hot air while producing cooling or dehumidified air as a by-product. In food processing and digital textile printing, where process heat is required alongside controlled cooling for process stability and equipment performance, heat pumps can simultaneously supply useful heat while reducing chiller or air-conditioner loads.

Health, safety and emission control

Beyond system efficiency, heat pumps can also improve worker health and safety. Workplace heat exposure is emerging as a serious occupational health risk, especially in labor-intensive factory environments where internal process heat compounds rising ambient temperatures. Globally, over 2.4 billion workers are exposed to excessive heat at work, with the highest exposure rates in Asia and the Pacific. Prolonged workplace heat is linked to heat exhaustion, heart stroke, cardiovascular strain, kidney disease, accident risk, and reduced cognitive performance.

In parallel, combustion-based process heat contributes to emission of harmful air pollutants exacerbating respiratory and cardiovascular health risks. The public health dimension is significant: fossil-fuel-driven air pollution caused an estimated 1.72 million premature deaths in India in 2022, with industrial heat systems being a key source of these emissions. In this context, increasing the use of electrified heating systems such as industrial heat pump technologies, particularly within the temperature ranges in which they are technically feasible can significantly improve air quality, mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and reduce health harms associated with both air pollution and climate change. By displacing on-site combustion and enabling the integration of heating and cooling, heat pumps can create opportunities for spot and space cooling to improve thermal comfort on factory floors.

What emerges, then, is not just a technology shift but a systems transition. Scaling industrial heat pumps will depend on how well they are embedded into existing industrial ecosystems through better process integration, reliable access to low-cost electricity, and financing models that work for industries, especially MSMEs. Done right, it can unlock not just emissions reduction, but a more resilient, efficient, and safer model of industrial growth.

(Srinivas Ethiraj is assistant manager, Energy Transition, at the Vasudha Foundation.)

GS Paper III – Economy

30 banks integrated with UDGAM portal to help legal heirs trace funds

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) told the Supreme Court on Tuesday that 30 banks have been integrated into its centralised web portal, UDGAM (Unclaimed Deposits - Gateway to Access InforMation), to enable legal heirs to trace funds belonging to deceased account holders.

A three-judge Bench headed by Justice Vikram Nath was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by journalist Sucheta Dalal, contending that funds lying in dormant or inoperative accounts were increasingly being transferred to government-managed pools.

The petitioner sought directions for the creation of a centralised platform to provide information on financial assets held by deceased persons.

Senior advocate Ranjit Kumar, appearing for the RBI, submitted that the UDGAM portal had already been operationalised to address the petitioner's concerns. "The UDGAM portal is an interactive platform. There are around 20 lakh registered users who have carried out around 44 lakh searches on the portal as of April 1," he said.

Mr. Kumar added that the 30 banks integrated into the portal account for nearly 90% of the funds held in the Depositors' Education and Awareness Fund (DEAF), a corpus set up by the RBI in 2014 to house unclaimed deposits from commercial and co-operative banks.

30 banks integrated into the portal account for nearly 90% of the funds held in DEAF.

The RBI clarified that the UDGAM portal that enables individuals to look up unclaimed deposits and accounts, but does not function as a claims settlement mechanism. "The object of the portal is to facilitate the identification and tracing of unclaimed deposits, so that the concerned depositor or claimant may approach the respective bank for settlement of the claim in accordance with the applicable procedure," it said.

Challenges for heirs

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the petitioner pointed out that deposits held in post offices, provident funds, and insurance schemes had not yet been integrated into the portal, thereby posing challenges for legal heirs seeking to claim such assets.

Taking note of the submissions, the Bench granted one week to the Centre and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to place on record the relevant circulars and outline the steps taken to enable the return of unclaimed funds of deceased persons held with banks and financial institutions.

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