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GS Paper II – Polity

Date: 27.05.26

Rajya Sabha defections, constitutional questions

The recent developments within the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), appear to have dealt a decisive blow to its representation in the Rajya Sabha. On April 24, 2026, seven out of its 10 sitting Members of Parliament, publicly announced that over two-thirds of the party's MPs had decided to merge with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), invoking the provisions of the 10th Schedule of the Constitution.

While the development has attracted widespread political attention, its implications extend beyond immediate partisan concerns. It raises significant constitutional questions regarding the interpretation of the anti-defection law, particularly the scope of the "merger" exception under the 10th Schedule. Nor is the episode entirely unprecedented. Similar assertions of legislative strength have been witnessed at the State level, most notably in the case of the Eknath Shinde-led faction in the Shiv Sena within the Maharashtra Assembly. However, the present instance assumes greater significance as it unfolds at the national level, involving MPs in the Rajya Sabha, thereby amplifying its constitutional and political consequences.

Anti-defection framework, 'split' doctrine

The Constitution, as originally adopted in 1950, provided for disqualification of MPs on limited grounds under Article 103, to be decided by the President of India acting on the opinion of the Election Commission of India. The 10th Schedule, introduced by the 52nd Constitution Amendment Act, 1985, expanded this framework to address the persistent problem of political defections adding another ground for disqualification of members to be decided by the Speaker or Chairman. The objective was to curb the practice of elected representatives abandoning their parties for political gain, by attaching the consequence of disqualification.

At the same time, the Schedule originally carved out two exceptions, "split" under Paragraph 3 and "merger" under Paragraph 4. The first, which recognised a split in a legislature party where one-third of its members formed a



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The recent episode involving the Aam Aadmi Party and the invocation of the provisions of the 10th Schedule highlights the need for judicial clarity

separate faction, was subsequently deleted by the 91st Constitution Amendment Act, 2003, following recommendations of Electoral Reforms (Dinesh Goswami Committee) in May 1990 and the 170th Law Commission Report, 1999. This deletion marked a conscious shift away from recognising internal fractures within legislature parties as a legitimate defence to defection.

The omission of Paragraph 3 carries deeper implications. The concept of "split" had implicitly recognised a degree of autonomy in the legislature party *vis-à-vis* the political party. Its removal signals Parliament's clear intent to restore primacy to the political party as the central unit of democratic accountability.

The Supreme Court of India has also reinforced this position in Subhash Desai vs Principal Secretary, Governor of Maharashtra (2023), where a Constitution Bench declined to interpret the 10th Schedule in a manner that severs the figurative umbilical cord between a legislature party and its parent political party. The Court underscored that the political party continues to guide and control the actions of its elected members, even after electoral victory.

The merger exception in question

The present controversy centres on the interpretation of Paragraph 4 of the 10th Schedule, which provides immunity from disqualification in cases of merger. The key question is whether such a merger can be effected solely by two-thirds of the members of a legislature party, or whether it must necessarily be preceded by, or reflect, a decision of the original political party itself.

A plain reading of Paragraph 4 suggests that the exemption applies where the "original political party" merges with another political party. The emphasis, therefore, is on the merger of the political party, not merely a numerical alignment within the legislature party. Hence, Paragraph 4(2), which introduces a deeming fiction based on the consent of two-thirds of legislators, cannot be read in isolation so as to displace the primacy of the political organisation.

To do so would invert the constitutional design, effectively allowing the legislature party to dictate the fate of the political party.

This interpretation would be inconsistent with Parliament's decision in exercise of constituent power to abolish the "split" exception, which had earlier permitted even a one-third faction to claim legitimacy. The threshold may have changed, but the principle remains that the internal dissent within the legislature party cannot override the identity and continuity of the political party.

Beyond technicalities

At a broader level, the anti-defection law was not merely intended to regulate individual conduct but to preserve the integrity of the party system and, by extension, the institution of 'opposition' in democracy. While it does not entirely prohibit political realignments, it subjects them to constitutional discipline.

The recent AAP episode underscores the need for judicial clarity on whether legislative majorities can, in effect, appropriate the identity of the political party they were elected to represent. The answer will have far-reaching implications for parliamentary democracy.

As lyricist and former parliamentarian Javed Akhtar once observed in the Rajya Sabha, the essential distinction between democracy and dictatorship lies in the presence of an opposition. It is this opposition that the 10th Schedule seeks to safeguard. AAP has approached the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha under Paragraph 6 of the 10th Schedule to challenge the action of its seven "merged" MPs.

How the merger exception is ultimately interpreted will be significant, particularly for the continued vitality of the Opposition. In the absence of settled judicial clarity, the issue is likely, sooner rather than later, to invite authoritative determination by the Supreme Court. The hope, ultimately, is that constitutional adjudication will preserve the centrality of political parties within India's parliamentary framework.



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GS Paper II – Governance

Kept word by tabling UCC Bill in the first House session: CM

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said the proposed Uniform Civil Code (UCC) would ensure “a new lease of independence” and social security for women from the minority communities.

Speaking at a discussion on the UCC Bill introduced in the 126-member House on Monday, he said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government fulfilled its poll promise by tabling the Bill.

“The UCC Bill will ensure safety and security for women of the minority community who have remained oppressed for decades,” the Chief Minister said.

He said the Opposition parties had criticised him before the election for saying the government would pursue the UCC if it could not be stopped politically. “I told them that if they fail to stop us, we will bring the UCC in the very first Assembly session. We acted on our commitment,” he said.

“I feel proud that Assam will be the third State to bring the UCC after Utta-



CM Himanta Biswa Sarma

rakhand and Gujarat,” he added.

‘Why exempt tribals?’

Echoing All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen chief Asaduddin Owaisi, some Congress MLAs said the UCC could not be described as “uniform” as it has separate provisions for tribal and non-tribal communities. The Uniform Civil Code, Assam, 2026 Bill exempts all Scheduled Tribes and Adivasi communities from its purview.

“If this Bill is good, it should apply to everyone. If it is bad, it should not be implemented at all,” Congress MLA Zubair Anam told journalists.

“What will happen if a non-tribal partner lives with a tribal girl?” he asked, insisting that the word “uniform” should apply to all communities.



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GS Paper II – Polity

The judiciary's role in complete justice

The Supreme Court is empowered under Article 142 to pass necessary orders to deliver complete justice where existing laws fail to provide a specific remedy. While this power acts as a 'constitutional safety valve', critics argue that it may lead to judicial encroachment upon the domain of the Executive or the Legislature

LETTER & SPIRIT

C.B.P. Srivastava

Another milestone in the direction of delivery of complete justice by the Supreme Court of India is its recent decision to elevate the Right to safe travel on National Highways as a fundamental right, declaring it an integral part of the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution. The Court took *suo motu* cognisance of two road accidents in November 2025, which led to a loss of 34 lives and has issued wide-ranging directives. [In *Re: Phalodi Accident vs. National Highways Authority of India and Others* (2025)]. The Court has clearly held that safe, well-maintained, and motorable roads are no longer just a policy goal, but a constitutional obligation of the state. It is an alarming fact that while National Highways comprise only 2% of roads, they account for 30% of fatalities. In 2025, National Highways in India saw approximately 26,770 deaths in the first six months alone. The government aims to reduce road accidents by 50% by 2030 and to achieve this goal, it has adopted a strategy focusing on strengthening Education, Engineering (roads/vehicles), Enforcement, and Emergency Medical Service has been adopted. Despite fatalities on the National Highways decreasing by 11% compared to 2024, they still remain alarmingly high. These figures must have been a contributing factor in the Supreme Court's decision while exercising its inherent power under Article 142 of the Constitution which talks about complete justice.

Inherent power of the Supreme Court
The Supreme Court is the custodian of the Constitution. Hence, it has been given such powers which could be exercised where the law is silent or is found incapable of grievance redressal. Such powers are not conferred by statute but



The power to deliver complete justice is residuary in nature. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

are inherent to its role as the highest court, enabling it to go beyond strict procedural constraints to prevent injustice or abuse of process. Another condition to invoke Article 142 is a manifest error and non-exercise of it might lead to travesty of justice. The Supreme Court in *Delhi Judicial Service Association vs. State of Gujarat* (1991) has held that the power to do complete justice is entirely of different level and of a different quality. The Court further says that any restrictions contained in ordinary laws cannot act as limitation on the constitutional power of the Court.

The concept of complete justice

A pertinent question that comes to our mind is whether justice could ever be incomplete. If not, then why has the term 'complete justice' been incorporated into Clause (1) of Article 142 of the Constitution? Another question that may arise is whether High Courts may also deliver complete justice.

The power to deliver complete justice is residuary in nature and it may be exercised to ensure the observance of due

process of law. This is an extraordinary jurisdiction implicitly vested with trust and faith that it shall be exercised by applying the principle of natural justice, i.e., fairness. The Court also recognises its significance, and therefore, held in *Hitesh Bhatnagar vs. Deepa Bhatnagar* (2011) that extraordinary care and caution shall be observed while exercising this jurisdiction.

Article 142 empowers the Supreme Court to pass any necessary order to deliver comprehensive, equitable justice, even if existing laws or procedural technicalities do not provide a specific remedy. This power acts as a "constitutional safety valve" to fill legal gaps. It is a well-established fact that the Constitution of India gives precedence to natural justice over other forms of justice. In a landmark judgment, the apex court, in *Canara Bank vs. Debasis Das* (2003), says that the Constitution intends to deliver substantive justice, which is the removal of injustices and it shall be delivered either by way of legal or natural justice. In a situation where legal justice is incapable of doing so, the principles of

natural justice must be followed.

Complete justice and High Courts

The question of whether High Courts could also deliver complete justice may be answered on the basis of the Supreme Court's decision in *Anil Kumar Jain vs. Maya Jain* (2009) in which the Court held that the powers of High Courts under Article 226 of the Constitution are certainly not at par with those of the Supreme Court under Article 142. However, justice is a wide concept and shall always be complete. Thus, the High Courts may also deliver complete justice, though in a more circumscribed manner than the Supreme Court, whose inherent powers under Article 142 serve as one of the tools for applying the concept of due process of law in rapidly changing social, economic, political and value systems within and outside India.

Cause for controversy

The exercise of Article 142 is often criticised as judicial overreach that undermines the principle of separation of powers. Critics point out that the Court bypasses the established laws and procedures and may encroach upon the domain of the Executive or the Legislature. However, such criticisms do not have much rationale. It is true that invoking Article 142 makes the judiciary more active. However, judicial activism involves the proactive and progressive interpretation of laws or constitutional provisions. Its constitutional intent is to deliver justice, be it social, economic, political or legal. The problem arises when new and evolving social realities, such as live-in relationships or matters relating to homosexuality, emerge and established laws and procedures may prove inadequate to deliver justice. In such situations the Supreme Court, as the custodian of the Constitution needs to proactively take steps to ensure that complete justice is delivered. (C.B.P. Srivastava is President, Centre for Applied Research in Governance, Delhi)

THE GIST

▼ The Supreme Court of India, as the custodian of the Constitution, has been given such powers which could be exercised where the law is silent or is found incapable of grievance redressal.

▼ The Court's power to deliver complete justice is residuary in nature, and it may be exercised to ensure the observance of due process of law. It is an extraordinary jurisdiction implicitly vested with trust and faith that it shall be exercised by applying the principle of natural justice.



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GS Paper II – Governance

How safe is India's critical national infrastructure?

Over the last few decades, critical infrastructure and services have been scaled up through automation, the Internet of Things and AI. However, this has also made them more vulnerable to attacks through IoT devices, highlighting the need for a policy framework to safeguard our infrastructure

L.N. Rajaram

Our everyday life depends on critical services that we often take for granted: water, electricity, cooking gas, petrol and diesel, groceries, banking, communications, transport, internet, healthcare, governance, law and order, courts and defence. Behind each of these lies a vast network of infrastructure: power plants, refineries, distribution systems, fuel transportation networks, railway stations, airports, hospitals, public utility systems and industrial installations. Any disruption can affect public safety, economic stability and national security.

Over the last few decades, these services have been scaled up through digital transformation. The internet, automation, the Internet of Things (IoT), and artificial intelligence (AI) have improved monitoring, prediction, control and service delivery. However, the same connectivity that improves efficiency also expands the risk horizon. Systems that were earlier isolated or locally controlled are now linked to digital networks, creating opportunities for remote disruption.

Complexities of the digital landscape

We are familiar with cyber risks in the digital world: server breaches, data theft, denial-of-service attacks, ransomware and online fraud. Governments have responded with cyber-security laws, certifications, protective systems and agencies such as CERT-In (Indian Computer Emergency Response Team). These measures have improved security, but they do not make critical infrastructure completely safe.

The larger emerging concern is that the

internet is no longer only a network of people, computers and servers. It has expanded to accommodate billions of connected devices. Cameras, GPS devices, temperature and pressure sensors, wind monitors, water-level sensors and industrial controllers are constantly collecting data and communicating with central systems. In refineries, power plants, chemical plants, manufacturing units and transport networks, such devices enable high levels of automation.

Earlier, many of these systems were local process control systems managed through SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition system). Today, they are increasingly connected to the internet for centralised monitoring, optimisation and predictive maintenance.

This creates the important triad of IT, OT and IoT. IT operates in the digital space, processing data and enabling computing. OT, or operational technology, operates in the physical world of plants, machinery, transport, industrial automation and critical assets. IoT connects the two by sensing physical conditions, sending real-time data to digital systems and, in many cases, executing commands through controllers and actuators. This connection is powerful, but it can also become the weak link. If the IoT layer is compromised, the data collected from the physical world can be manipulated, or control over physical processes can be misused.

Critical infrastructure security

Therefore, critical infrastructure security must go beyond conventional cyber security. Physical installations may have heavy security and restricted access, but the devices connecting them to digital

systems may still expose them to invisible risks. The real question is whether these devices can be trusted. They must not contain hidden vulnerabilities, unauthorised data-sharing mechanisms, malicious control pathways or embedded Trojans that can be exploited later.

This issue becomes serious when imported devices are deployed in sensitive installations without rigorous scrutiny. India speaks strongly about *Atmanirbhar Bharat* and *Made in India*, but this intent has not always translated into procurement practices at lower levels of government departments and public sector undertakings (PSUs). Tender conditions often do not insist on trusted Indian-made products or deep security evaluation. Eligibility is frequently assessed through template-based compliance checks rather than careful examination of design origin, manufacturing authenticity and operational vulnerability. Existing IT guidelines and IoT policies are also not enforced with the seriousness required for national-level infrastructure.

Fuel transportation is a practical example. Earlier, tankers carrying fuel from oil terminals to retail outlets were protected with ordinary seals, locks and keys, leaving room for pilferage. Over time, the system moved to IoT-based keyless and OTP-based e-locking, supported by GPS tracking and digital monitoring. These solutions improve accountability and security, but they also become critical control points in the fuel supply chain. If vehicle tracking systems or e-locks are imported or unverified or dubiously certified, the oil supply chain can become vulnerable to remote disruption. There are increasing instances of electronic locks with GPS and communication capabilities that are

manufactured in China getting certifications in India as an Indian product.

Need for strengthening certification

The recent certification of cameras, by STQC tests devices ensures that they do not perform unintended control or data-sharing functions. However, the certification process is onerous and lengthy. More importantly, similar mechanisms are not yet available or strongly enforced for many other IoT devices used in critical infrastructure.

High level of awareness is needed for economic security. Future attacks may target the industrial base, supply chains, utilities and automated infrastructure that support national growth. A recent attack on systems that monitor U.S. gas stations' fuel storage, reported by CNN is a case in point.

As India moves toward becoming a major global economy and digitally empowered nation, the safety of critical infrastructure cannot be treated merely as a technical issue. It is a matter of sovereignty, resilience and economic security. India must embrace IoT, AI and automation, but it must do so with trust, transparency and strong safeguards. The need of the hour is stricter policy enforcement, rigorous certification, preference for trusted indigenous technologies and continuous vigilance across government and industry. The question is not whether we should adopt connected technologies, but whether we are deploying them securely enough to protect the nation's future.

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GS Paper III – Economy

India, U.S. draw up deal on rare earth elements

Framework follows growing concerns over China's export controls of strategic metals; Australia, Japan join fellow Quad members in separate framework among the grouping on critical minerals

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

On the sidelines of the 11th Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM), India and the United States on Tuesday firmed up an important framework for cooperation in ensuring steady supplies of critical minerals, in a move that follows growing concerns over China's export controls of rare earth minerals and strategic metals vital for technology supply chains.

"The Framework aims to deepen India-U.S. cooperation across the critical minerals and rare earths supply chain, including mining, processing, recycling and related investments. It seeks to strengthen resilient and diversified supply chains,

Rare deal

The framework comes amid shortfall of critical metals in global markets after China imposed export curbs on rare earth elements



Mining strategy: The agreement follows continued India-U.S. engagements, including India becoming a signatory to the U.S.-led Pax Silica initiative. REUTERS

while promoting collaboration in financing and effective management of critical minerals and rare earths scrap," said an announcement on the "Framework" titled "Securing of supply in the mining and processing of critical minerals and rare earths".

The understanding between India and the U.S. has been under consideration at least since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Washington in February 2025, when secure supply routes for critical minerals were considered a "shared strategic

priority", said a official press note.

A separate framework on critical minerals was also signed among the four Quad nations – Australia, India, Japan and the United States – which aims at mobilising around \$20 billion in government and private-sector support to establish stable supply chains for critical minerals.

The initiatives aim at dealing with the shortfall of critical metals in global markets that intensified after China imposed export controls on rare earth elements in 2025, after the U.S.'s imposition of tariffs on a large number of partner countries.

Framework seeks to:

- Implement **effective management** of critical minerals and rare earths scrap
- Strengthen resilient and **diversified supply chains**
- Promote **collaboration in financing**

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GS Paper III – Environment

India's energy strategy needs price correction

The Strait of Hormuz is no longer just a geopolitical flashpoint; it has become the fault line of the global energy economy. As tensions in West Asia continue to disrupt shipping through one of the world's most critical maritime corridors, countries across the globe are confronting a harsh reality: energy security is now inseparable from geopolitics. For India, which depends on imports for the overwhelming majority of its crude oil needs, the crisis has exposed both the strength of recent policy interventions and the limits of shielding consumers indefinitely from market realities.

The immediate impact of the conflict has been visible in global crude markets. Brent prices have surged sharply amid fears of prolonged disruption to Gulf supplies, while freight costs and marine insurance premiums have climbed to multi-year highs. Shipping routes are being diverted around the Cape of Good Hope, extending delivery timelines by weeks and significantly increasing transportation expenses. Global gas markets, too, remain under pressure following disruptions linked to the shutdown of key liquefied natural gas export infrastructure in Qatar. Despite this turbulence, the crisis has not hit Indian consumers as ferociously as it should be so far. Petrol and diesel prices at Indian fuel pumps have remained relatively stable, hovering near ₹95 per litre in many cities, even as fuel prices in several advanced economies rose steeply, by about 25% on average. Petrol prices in Germany and the United Kingdom have crossed the equivalent of roughly ₹220 and ₹204 per litre, respectively, while Hong Kong continues to record some of the world's highest fuel prices at nearly ₹291 per litre. This stability is not a coincidence. It has been achieved through an extraordinary combination of state intervention, supply diversification, and financial absorption by public sector oil companies.

Interventions that come at a steep cost

Over the past few years, India has quietly built a more resilient energy architecture. The country expanded its sourcing basket beyond the Gulf, increased strategic reserves, and strengthened ties with suppliers in Russia, the United States, West Africa, and the Atlantic basin. Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri recently reiterated that India's crude supply position remains secure despite disruptions around the Strait of Hormuz, pointing to the country's growing ability to source oil from non-Gulf origins and maintain refinery throughput at high levels.

Taking advantage of the exit of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, India signed an agreement with the UAE to store 30 million of crude oil in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve. The government's response since the latest



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escalation has been swift. Refineries were directed to maximise LPG production to meet rising domestic demand, especially given the dramatic expansion of cooking gas access under the Ujjwala scheme. LPG connections in India have risen from roughly 14.5 crore in 2014 to more than 33 crore today, fundamentally transforming household energy consumption patterns. Gas allocation was prioritised for households, public transport networks, and fertilizer plants to avoid cascading disruptions across essential sectors. Domestic LPG production was reportedly increased by nearly 50% during the peak of the crisis response, while all 25 fertilizer plants continued receiving around 70% of their gas requirements to maintain agricultural supply chains. Naval deployments in the Gulf of Oman, diplomatic engagement with multiple countries, and efforts to secure alternative shipping arrangements underline how seriously India has treated the crisis. These measures have bought the country valuable time. But they have also come at a steep cost.

Pressures on oil firms

India's state-run Oil Marketing Companies (OMC) are now operating under enormous financial stress, selling fuel below market-linked costs in order to protect consumers from inflationary shocks. Mr. Puri recently indicated that under-recoveries could rise sharply if elevated crude prices persist, with some estimates placing daily losses near ₹700 crore-₹800 crore during peak volatility. The government has already reduced excise duties and imposed temporary export restrictions on refined fuels to retain supplies within the domestic market.

This strategy may be politically prudent in the short term, but is economically difficult to sustain over a prolonged period. Energy subsidies of this scale eventually strain public finances, weaken the balance sheets of oil companies, and distort market signals that encourage efficient energy consumption.

The larger challenge is that India's vulnerability is structural, not temporary. Nearly every major sector of the economy – transport, logistics, aviation, manufacturing, agriculture, and fertilizers – remains heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels. Even if India succeeds in avoiding immediate shortages, it cannot remain permanently insulated from a prolonged global energy shock.

There are already signs that the government recognises this reality. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeals for responsible energy use – including reducing unnecessary travel, conserving fuel, and encouraging remote work where feasible – reflect an administration preparing the public for a period of prolonged uncertainty. Such messaging would have seemed extraordinary only a few years ago. Today, it

appears pragmatic. There is a strong argument for calibrated correction. India has managed inflation relatively effectively over the past decade compared to many major economies, creating some room for a measured increase in petroleum prices without triggering runaway inflation. Consumer Price Index inflation remained comparatively moderate in early 2026 – at around 3.2% to 3.5% through the first four months of the year – suggesting that limited price rationalisation may still be economically manageable. A gradual pass-through of global energy costs would reduce the fiscal burden on the state, stabilise oil marketing companies, and encourage more responsible consumption patterns.

For now, India has demonstrated remarkable agility in navigating one of the most serious energy disruptions in modern history. Supplies remain stable, panic has been avoided, and the government has managed to shield ordinary citizens from the worst immediate consequences.

The realities of a new energy era

But energy shocks of this scale eventually demand economic realism. The true cost of fuel cannot be deferred forever. India's challenge is no longer merely surviving the crisis; it is preparing the public and the economy for a world in which energy security will remain fragile, contested, and deeply political for years to come.

Recent reports suggest that Indian refiners continue to diversify sourcing aggressively even as global analysts warn that a prolonged Hormuz disruption could widen India's fiscal deficit and weaken the rupee. That should serve as a reminder that the situation is not a temporary headline cycle. It marks the beginning of a new energy era – one in which resilience, diversification, and conservation will matter as much as diplomacy itself. The government has raised petroleum product prices several times, cumulatively by about 7%. Yet, this piecemeal approach neither matches international crude oil prices adequately nor meaningfully reduces the burden on OMCs. Reports suggest that OMCs continue to incur losses of ₹700 crore to ₹800 crore a day, and that only an additional 13% hike, beyond the existing 7%, would eliminate these losses. It has also been reported that the government has returned to adjusting fuel prices in line with fluctuations in international crude oil prices. However, frequent revisions create uncertainty for consumers trying to manage household and business budgets. Instead of incremental increases, the government should implement a one-time price hike of at least 13% on petroleum products, including petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel. Such a move, though difficult, would reduce uncertainty, stabilise OMC finances, and allow prices to remain steady until there is a significant shift in global crude prices.

The petro products price hike is too little and too late



GS Paper III – Science & Technology

NCDs accounted for 60% of all deaths in 2022-2024

Non-communicable diseases are increasingly becoming the major cause of death even among women and the rural population

DATA POINT

Bindu Shajan Perappadan

India's youth mortality profile is shifting with Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) being the cause of 60% of all deaths in the 2022-2024 reporting period, according to the Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report 2024, released this month. This was an increase of 7.3 percentage points compared with the 2015-2017 reporting period, when NCDs were the cause of 52.8% of all deaths (Chart 1).

Analysis showed that among the NCDs, cardiovascular diseases alone accounted for 32.1% of all deaths in 2022-2024, which is again an increase of five percentage points compared with 27.1% in 2015-2017. The combined share of communicable diseases, and maternal, perinatal and nutritional conditions as the major cause of death in India has meanwhile come down from 22% in the 2015-2017 period to 19.7% in 2022-2024.

Age-group-wise data presented in the Cause of Deaths in India: 2022-2024 report showed that while cardiovascular diseases accounted for 32.1% of all deaths caused by NCDs, they accounted for 37.3% in the 30-69 age group. Health experts note that heart-related illnesses are increasingly affecting adults in their 30s and 40s, which is a matter of concern as this age group forms a large part of the nation's workforce.

The findings assume significance as India is witnessing a decline in fertility rates. Several States are already below the replacement fertility level of 2.1 children per woman.

In the 2022-2024 reporting period, while 69.3% of deaths happened in the 55-plus age group, those aged between 30 and 44 accounted for 19.5% of deaths, making premature deaths among younger adults an economic and social concern.

Analysis of the data over the years showed notable differences between the rural and urban population and between men and women. NCDs were the cause of 64.8% of all deaths in urban areas while they accounted for only 58.8% of all deaths in rural areas. Similarly, NCDs accounted for 62.3% of all deaths among men and 56.9% among women. However, the trend of NCDs becoming the major cause of death is clearly visible even among the rural population and women (Chart 2).

After cardiovascular diseases, the top causes of death in the 2022-2024 reporting period included cancer and other neoplasms, respiratory diseases, digestive diseases and respiratory infections, each accounting for more than 5% of all deaths (Table 1).

The report suggests that India is now experiencing an epidemiological transition similar to that seen in many middle- and high-income countries, where chronic illnesses dominate mortality trends. At the same time, infectious diseases continue to remain a challenge, creating what public health experts describe as a "double burden" of disease.

Suicide remains the leading cause of death among the 15-29 age group, compared with 16.3% in 2015-2017. The rise in suicides points to growing mental health pressures, including unemployment, academic stress, financial difficulties, and social isolation.

The report also showed stark differences between the group of eight States – Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand – which were identified for special focus for the Government under its Empowered Action Group (EAG) along with Assam and other States (Chart 3). In EAG States and Assam, NCDs accounted for 53.9% of all deaths compared with 63.5% for other States.

Cause for concern

The data for the charts were sourced from Sample Registration System – Statistical Reports and Causes of Deaths in India Reports. In the charts, EAG refers to empowered action group



CHART 1: Major causes for deaths in India over reporting periods from 2015-2017 onwards

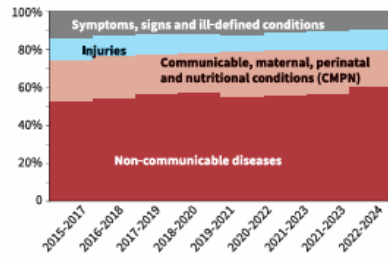


CHART 2: Share of deaths due to NCDs between rural and urban areas and men and women

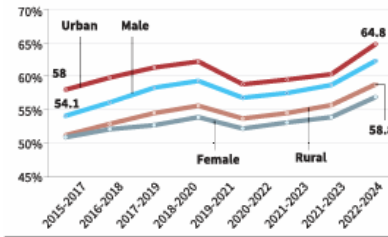


CHART 3: Share of deaths due to NCDs and communicable diseases between EAG States and Assam versus other States

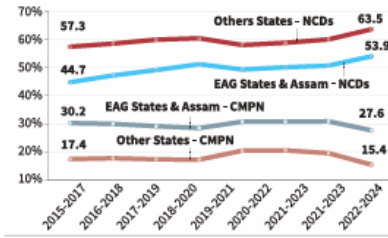


TABLE 1: Top 10 causes of deaths among all age groups, and in the 15-29 and 30-69 age groups in India

Cause	All ages (%)	Age 15-29 (%)	Age 30-69 (%)
Cardiovascular diseases	32.1	10.8	37.3
Cancer	7	4.2	10.3
Digestive diseases	5.9	7.5	8.9
Respiratory diseases	6	-	5.1
Respiratory infections	5.7	-	-
Diabetes mellitus	3.6	-	3.9
Genito-urinary diseases	3.4	-	4.7
Fever of unknown origin	4.1	3.3	-
Road accidents	-	17.7	4.2
Other unintentional injuries	4.1	8.6	3.9
Suicide	-	19	3.4
Tuberculosis	-	3.1	3.5
Neuro-psychiatric conditions	-	3	-
Ill-defined / other symptoms	9.7	3.2	-

The blank cells in the table above indicate that the respective causes were not among the top 10 causes for the corresponding age groups

As shown in the table above, road accidents and suicides disproportionately affect younger people. Deaths caused by motor vehicle accidents increased from 2.9% in 2021-2023 to 3.2% in 2022-2024 for all age groups, while deaths due to suicides rose from 2.5% to 2.8% in the same period

In Chart 1, the increase in deaths due to communicable diseases during 2019-2021 and 2020-2022 was due to COVID-19



GS Paper III – Environment

Give prosecution immunity to Chambal guards, says SC

Top court asks Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan to consider granting it for any bona fide actions taken against miners in the line of duty; Bench seeks report from States by next hearing

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court directed Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan on Tuesday to consider immunity for forest guards serving on the frontline in the battle to protect Chambal against illegal sand miners.

The court said the States should examine the need to notify prosecution immunity for their forest guards under Section 218 (3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita for any bona fide actions taken against miners in the line of duty. The immunity is the same as the one afforded to the armed forces.

The court sought a report from the States by the next hearing.

The direction passed by a Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta sent a clear message to the three States that frontline forest officials should not fear prosecution under law while fighting the lawless.

The order, pronounced by Justice Mehta, contained a series of directions to push back against the rampant illegal mining

Guarding the guards

The court issued the direction for immunity from prosecution under Section 218(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita

COURT'S SUPPORT

Forest guards working in dangerous anti-mining operations should not hesitate to act because of fear of later criminal prosecution

Court passed the order using extraordinary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution - doing "complete justice" in any pending case

Court directed installation of CCTV-based carpet surveillance and live monitoring



THE BACKGROUND

Order comes after two forest guards were brutally killed by miners in Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan

The case concerns illegal sand extraction inside the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary, an ecologically sensitive habitat

which is destroying the National Chambal gharial sanctuary and its fragile ecosystem.

The court's direction was also a response to the brutal murders of forest guards by sand miners in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Harikesh Gurjar, a forest guard, was crushed under a truck by sand miners while trying to halt an illegal mining operation in Morena district of Madhya Pradesh on April 8. Jitendra Singh Shekhawat, another forest guard sta-

tioned at Dholpur district in Rajasthan, was run over while trying to stop miners' vehicles from getting away.

In April, on learning about the deaths of the forest guards, a frustrated apex court had said it would order the deployment of paramilitary forces in the Chambal area unless the three States took "concrete measures" to stop the miners.

The court had observed that the apathy shown by the States reeked of tacit connivance and helplessness

in the face of the "superior firepower" and acts of lawlessness of the miners.

The Bench urgently sought a response from the three States on a news report that sand mining was continuing unabated. The court listed the case for hearing on May 29.

In a series of directions passed under Article 142 of the Constitution to ensure "complete justice and to ensure environmental and statutory safeguards in the affected regions" of the Chambal sanctuary, the court ordered the States to take immediate steps to augment the field level enforcement officers in their forest departments to effect protection, surveillance and patrolling of the affected regions.

The recruitment process must be completed and vacancies filled within a year. The Chief Secretaries have to file compliance reports in the court.

The court directed the States to establish carpet surveillance of the protected areas through installation of CCTV cameras and live streaming. "The process should be undertaken on a war-footing," it said.

SC to examine if law is diluting the count of wetlands in India

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to examine a challenge to the constitutional validity of the definition of 'wetlands' in the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 for arbitrarily excluding most human-made, artificial, and historically developed wetlands from environmental protection and diluting accountability through decentralised oversight.

A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant issued formal notice to the Union government on a petition filed jointly by a group of environmental activists and professionals led by Ravindra Sinha that the definition of 'wetlands' in Rule 2(g) of the 2017 law was inconsistent with India's binding international obligations under the Ramsar Convention, 1971.

The Convention expressly included both natural and artificial wetlands, whether permanent or temporary, without distinction, senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan and advocate Anindita Mitra submitted for the petitioners.

"The definition under the 2017 Rules will have the

The term 'wetlands' in Rule 2(g) of the 2017 law goes against India's obligations under the Ramsar Convention: petition

disastrous impact of 39 human-made wetlands, out of a total of 94 Ramsar Convention wetlands located in India losing their status as protected wetlands. By carving out exclusions for waterbodies constructed for drinking water, irrigation, aquaculture, salt production, recreation, and allied purposes, the Rule has the effect of removing a substantial majority of India's wetlands from the protective framework of environmental law," the petitioners submitted.

The dilution witnessed in the 2017 Rules violated the principle of non-regression, which prohibits governments from weakening an existing legal protection.

The 2017 Rules has also departed from the proven manner of identification and recording of wetlands in national wetland inventories based on their functional characteristics, rather than their origin, that is, human-made or natural.



Learn Beyond

GS Paper III – Environment

WHAT IS IT?

Sea level: hands on a skater

Vasudevan Mukunth

A new study in *JGR Solid Earth* has suggested that climate change is changing the distribution of water and ice in a way that may be affecting how long one day is on the earth more dramatically than scientists expected.

The study's authors, from Austria and Switzerland, analysed palaeoclimate records going back 3.6 million years along with a new deep-learning method to understand how the sea levels changed over time.

Just as a spinning skater can slow down by extending their arms, changes in the distribution of water between the oceans and the ice sheets can, in small ways, alter how fast the earth rotates.

Scientists have long known that the moon, the earth's atmosphere, and even processes deep underground influence the length of day. The contribution of climate change however remains poorly understood.

In the study, the researchers combined climate models with proxies for the earth's past climate, including geological evidence from fossils, to estimate the sea level at various points of time since the Late Pliocene epoch. According to the team, modern climate change may be increasing the length of day at a rate among the fastest in the last 3.6 million years: around 1.33 ms per



Scientists have long known that the moon, the earth's atmosphere, and even processes deep underground influence the length of day. NASA

century. That is roughly 13 microseconds per year. This is just the climate-induced component of the change. At this pace, it would take around 75,000-80,000 years one day to become one second longer. Of course, in the meantime, the rate at which a day is lengthening may also increase.



For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'

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